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June 26, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Senate Hart Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of AARP's 38 million members in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories, I am writing to share AARP's views on the *Agriculture Improvements Act of 2018* in its current form. We appreciate the bipartisan work that the Senate has undertaken in this legislation. We are pleased the bill protects and makes improvements to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that millions of Americans, including older Americans, rely upon.

SNAP is the nation's largest federal nutrition program and is an important safety net for 43 million food insecure Americans. According to AARP's Public Policy Institute, 8.7 million SNAP households had at least one adult age 50 or older in 2016. SNAP is an especially important program for older Americans because many live on fixed incomes and have limited financial resources to spend on necessities like food and housing. According to a 2015 AARP Foundation research report, one in three adults over age 50 had to cut down or skip meals in the prior year because of a lack of sufficient funds to purchase food, and one in five had difficulty buying nutritious food.

Beyond the economic impact, access to SNAP has been linked to better health outcomes. Older Americans receiving SNAP are less likely to forgo needed medicines due to cost. Moreover, SNAP participation has been linked to reduced hospital and nursing home admissions among older adults. Access to adequate SNAP benefits may also help avoid costly hospitalizations for conditions such as low blood sugar.

Despite the health and economic benefits of the nutritional assistance provided under SNAP, older Americans already underutilize the program. Data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows that eligible older Americans participate in SNAP at a lower rate than any other age group. While the participation rate for all

eligible households is 85 percent, only 41 percent of eligible elderly households participate in SNAP. Although the participation rate is slightly higher for households with only one elderly individual, at 54 percent, the rate remains woefully low.

Protecting older Americans from food insecurity is a priority for AARP. Through AARP's Foundation — a charitable affiliate of AARP — we have led efforts to raise awareness about senior poverty and the tough choices older adults are making to keep food on the table. We are also investing in solutions to fight hunger and poverty and creating positive health outcomes for older adults.

We are pleased that the *Agriculture Improvements Act of 2018* protects SNAP and includes modest improvements that could help to reduce some of the administrative burdens faced by older Americans who rely on the program. These commonsense provisions include allowing states to certify SNAP eligibility for certain elderly and disabled adults without earned income—such as those who are grandparents caring for grandchildren—for up to 36 months. This will reduce the amount of paperwork and number of office visits that these individuals, who tend to live on fixed incomes, must comply with to remain eligible for SNAP.

The bill also eases burdens for older Americans benefiting from the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). This program provides critical nutritional assistance in the form of food packages that supplement the diets of low-income older adults age 60 and older. The bill requires states to certify eligible older Americans in the CSFP for one year and gives states the option to go further by electing a three-year certification period.

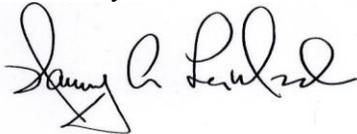
The *Agriculture Improvements Act of 2018* also provides additional employment and training opportunities for individuals, including older Americans on SNAP. This includes access to training and work opportunities through private employer or nonprofit organization workforce partnerships as well as additional employment and training pilot projects targeted at specific populations, including individuals age 50 years and older. While the bill's additional employment and training opportunities could be helpful, it is important to note that employment and training alone will not alleviate the challenges older Americans face when seeking employment, in particular, the persistent challenge of age discrimination. While most individuals who receive SNAP benefits are already working, older Americans who have been out of the labor force for a length of time face significant barriers to gaining employment.

AARP remains very concerned about the food security of thousands of seniors still suffering from the immense damage caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. We urge the Senate to maintain the authorization of \$635 million for the Puerto Rico Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) for FY 2019 for an additional two years, FY 2020 and FY 2021. It is expected that reauthorization at this level would help Puerto Rico maintain vital food aid to 347,000 NAP participants; the majority of NAP participants prior to the hurricanes were seniors, the disabled and children.

Finally, we support the bill's inclusion of the bi-partisan, bi-cameral Broadband Connection for Rural Opportunities Program (B-CROP) legislation. For older American households, the ability of broadband to enable aging-in-place, telehealth, and distance learning are substantial and growing, but too often, rural communities do not share in those benefits. B-CROP increases the Rural Utilities Services funding and authorizes the fund to make grants in addition to loans for the development of qualifying rural broadband projects.

We commend the Senate, under the leadership of Senators Roberts and Stabenow, for its bipartisan work to protect SNAP and to reject any new barriers to this program. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me or contact Joyce Rogers, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs at 202-434-3750.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy A. LeMond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "L".

Nancy A. LeMond
Executive Vice President and
Chief Advocacy and Engagement Officer