



June 21, 2018

Dear Representative:

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 urge you to vote NO on H.R. 2, the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018. In its current form, this bill would have a negative impact on the millions of Americans, including older Americans, who rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

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

Beyond the economic impact, 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. Finally, access to adequate benefits may help avoid costly hospitalizations for conditions such as high blood sugar. In fact, one recent study showed how health care and food insecurity causes are inexorably linked, finding the risk for hospital admissions for high blood sugar spiked 27 percent in the last week of the month (compared to the first week of the month) among low-income people, when food and SNAP budgets have often been exhausted.

Despite the health and economic benefits of the nutritional assistance provided under SNAP, currently older Americans underutilize the program. Data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows that 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. While the participation rate is slightly higher for households with only one elderly individual, at 54 percent, these rates remain woefully low and the USDA should improve outreach and education to older Americans.

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 create positive health outcomes for older adults.

AARP opposes H.R. 2 in its current form because it adds new barriers in the SNAP program, including expanding work requirements for 50-to-59 year-olds, that will result in greater food insecurity and older Americans losing the nutritional assistance they need and depend on. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that under H.R. 2 there will be 1.2 million fewer people in an average month receiving SNAP benefits in 2028, of which about 27 percent “would be between the ages of 50 and 59 and without dependents.”

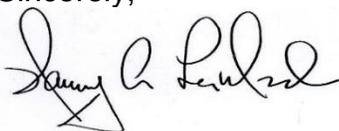
Most individuals who receive SNAP benefits and are required to work are already working. Expanding work requirements for SNAP would be especially challenging for older workers ages 50-59 who have a more difficult time finding employment after a period of unemployment. Furthermore, the punitive measures included within H.R. 2 would potentially lock individuals and families out of needed SNAP benefits if they fail to meet or demonstrate that they meet the law’s work requirements. Those who fail to meet the work requirements one single time could lose benefits for one year, while each subsequent failure could result in a lock-out of 36 months.

In addition to expanding the law’s work requirements, H.R. 2 would make it harder for individuals to qualify for SNAP through categorical eligibility. Categorical eligibility is essential to improving access to SNAP for low-income Americans of all ages and must be protected. Categorical eligibility advances the goals of simplifying administration, easing entry to the program for eligible households, emphasizing coordination among low-income assistance programs, and reducing the potential for errors in establishing eligibility for benefits. Individuals who have already undergone eligibility determinations for programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) can bypass SNAP’s income and resource tests. This streamlined process can reduce redundant administrative steps for states and helps individuals and families get their SNAP benefits.

We are also concerned with the language included in Sec. 6004, which would establish a loan and grant program to establish agricultural association health plans (AHPs). AARP has long raised concerns with the lack of protections and benefits for consumers under AHPs, specifically since AHPs increase the fragmentation of risk pools, which drive up the costs for older Americans. Additionally, these plans are not required to adhere to the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA) consumer protections, specifically the 3:1 age rating requirement, prohibition on discrimination because of preexisting conditions, and the requirement to cover the essential health benefits.

In light of these concerns, we urge Congress to vote NO on H.R. 2 and instead work to reauthorize a bipartisan Farm bill that protects the critical nutritional assistance SNAP provides to this nation’s most vulnerable populations. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me, or contact Joyce A. Rogers, Senior Vice President for 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