



July 26, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
U.S. Senate
328-A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
U.S. Senate
328-A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson:

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 as the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* enters into conference. Millions of Americans, including older Americans, rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to put food on the table. We urge the conference to work in a bipartisan manner to produce a conference agreement that protects SNAP and rejects creating additional program barriers for individuals and families struggling with food insecurity.

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, essential medicines, 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 last year because they lacked 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 is associated with 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.

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 often forced to make to keep food on the table.

AARP strongly supports the improvements made to SNAP that were included in the bipartisan Senate-passed bill. This includes 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. We also support the changes made in both the House and Senate bills to the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) that will ease burdens for older Americans benefiting from the program. This includes requiring states to certify eligible older Americans in the CSFP for one year and giving states the option to certify beyond a one year certification period. These changes could help to reduce some of the administrative burdens faced by older Americans who rely on these programs.

We also support additional the employment and training opportunities for individuals on SNAP included in the Senate-passed bill. These include 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.

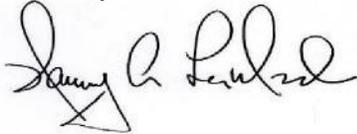
However, we strongly oppose the expanded work requirements for people ages 50-59 included in the House-passed bill. It is important to recognize the challenges older Americans face when seeking employment, particularly age discrimination. While most individuals who receive SNAP benefits are already working, older Americans who fall out of the labor force face significant barriers to gaining employment and take longer to find employment compared to younger age groups. We also oppose provisions in the House-passed bill that would lock individuals and families out of needed SNAP benefits if they fail to meet or demonstrate that they meet the law's work requirements. Furthermore, we oppose the changes in the House-passed bill that 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 is especially important in light of the fact that so many older adults who are eligible for SNAP are not enrolled in the program. Creating enrollment barriers only exacerbates the problem of under enrollment of older adults in this critically important program.

We also urge the conference committee to reject the expansion of association health plans (AHPs) included in Section 6004 of the House-passed bill. AARP has long raised concerns about the lack of protections and benefits for consumers under AHPs. AHPs increase the fragmentation of risk pools, which drive up health care costs, particularly for older Americans. Additionally, these plans are not required to adhere to the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) consumer protections, including the 3:1 age rating requirement, the prohibition on discrimination because of preexisting conditions, and the requirement to cover essential health benefits.

Finally, we were pleased that the Senate-passed bill included the bi-partisan, bi-cameral Broadband Connection for Rural Opportunities Program (B-CROP) and urge these provisions be retained in conference. Increasingly, many older American households are using broadband to enable aging-in-place and access telehealth, and distance learning services. Unfortunately, rural communities often do not have reliable broadband connectivity to take advantage of these sorts of opportunities. 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 appreciate the opportunity to outline AARP's priorities as conference discussions begin. 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. Leamond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "L".

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