

August 22, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, &
Forestry
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Washington, D.C. 20510
The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, &
Forestry
U.S. Senate

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

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

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to express our views as the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 enters into conference. We urge the farm bill conference committee to work in a bipartisan manner to produce an agreement that protects and strengthens our nation's nutrition assistance programs and rejects any provisions that would create additional barriers for individuals and families struggling with food insecurity.

Older adults continue to experience challenges to meeting basic food needs. In 2015, nearly 10.6 million households with adults age 50 and older faced the threat of hunger.¹ Food-insecure seniors experience lower nutritional intakes and are more likely to have diabetes, depression, limitations in activities of daily living (ADLs), high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, heart attacks, gum disease and asthma than their food-secure counterparts.² These conditions translate into increased health care costs that are then passed onto taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's largest federal nutrition program and an important safety net for 42 million Americans experiencing food insecurity.³ In 2016, 22 percent of the 21 million households that participated in SNAP were households with at least one eligible elderly adult.⁴ The typical elderly household enrolled in SNAP—defined as having at least one eligible individual aged 60 or older—has an annual income of nearly \$11,000. Over 80 percent of elderly SNAP

¹ DataExplorer. AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey, 2010-2015 Food Security Supplements. <https://dataexplorer.aarp.org/>

² Feeding America and the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger. *Spotlight on Senior Health: Adverse Outcomes of Food Insecure Older Americans*. 2015. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/senior-hunger-research/or-spotlight-on-senior-health-executive-summary.pdf>

³ United States Department of Agriculture. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Tables. 2018. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

⁴ Dean, Olivia and Flowers, Lynda. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Provides Benefits for Millions of Adults Ages 50 and Older. AARP Public Policy Institute. 2018. <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2018/04/snap-provides-benefits-for-millions-of-adults-ages-50-and-older.pdf>

recipients live alone,⁵ receiving an average monthly benefit of \$106 per month – less than \$4 per day.⁶ This modest benefit helps seniors who too often are forced to choose between paying for food, medicine, rent, heat or other daily costs.

The undersigned groups are in strong support of the following targeted improvements made to further strengthen SNAP that were included in the bipartisan Senate-passed farm bill, and changes made to streamline the application process of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) in both the House- and Senate-passed bills.

Allowing extended certification periods for targeted populations: The Senate-passed bill would allow states to extend SNAP certification periods from two years to up to three years for households with only members who are elderly or who have a disability and have no earned income. We also support the changes made to CSFP in both the House- and Senate-passed bills that would establish a minimum certification period of one year and provide states with the flexibility to further extend the certification period. These households often live on fixed incomes, and an extended certification period would make it easier for them to continue receiving assistance by reducing the burden of paperwork and office visits.

Strengthening employment and training opportunities: The Senate-passed bill would invest in additional SNAP employment and training pilot projects with the goal of helping participants find sustainable employment and prioritizing specific populations like individuals ages 50 years and older. The bill would also encourage states to create new public-private partnerships to support job training and leverage existing job training opportunities to connect SNAP participants to private employers and non-profit organizations for substantial, high-quality training or work experience.

The undersigned groups are in strong opposition to the following measures in the House-passed bill that would limit access to SNAP for millions of Americans, including many older adults.

Redirecting investments to meet training needs: We oppose the changes in the House-passed bill that would redirect funding from food assistance to employment and training programs. Federal workforce development programs like the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), the only such program targeted to low-income older workers, have been subject to years of disinvestment. The resources would be inadequate to address the significant barriers to employment that many older job searchers face, and insufficient to fully execute the scale of the program as proposed by this legislation.

Narrowing time limits and expanding work requirements: We are in strong opposition to expanding work requirements for people ages 50 to 59 and narrowing time limits on the receipt of SNAP benefits for those out of work. Older workers already often

⁵ Ibid., Appendix C

⁶ United States Department of Agriculture. Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2016. 2017. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2016.pdf>

face a wide range of challenges, including discrimination, health issues, and caregiving responsibilities that might keep them out of the workforce.⁷ The House-passed bill's more stringent work requirements fail to reflect the full breadth of caregiving responsibilities that many older Americans assume. This includes providing uncompensated care to children over the age of 6, assisting aging parents with daily living activities, and other responsibilities such as interacting with various providers, agencies and professionals on their care recipient's behalf. Additionally, the average time an unemployed jobseeker spent seeking employment in 2017 was 31.2 weeks among those ages 45 to 54 and 36.6 weeks among those ages 55 to 64.⁸ This period lasts well beyond the current 3-month time limit on SNAP benefits in a 3-year time period for unemployed adults who are not disabled or raising minor children.

Restricting categorical eligibility: We oppose the changes in the House-passed bill that would make it more difficult for individuals to qualify for SNAP through categorical eligibility. Categorical eligibility is important for improving access to SNAP, especially for older adults. Older adults are significantly less likely to participate in SNAP compared to younger age groups,⁹ and creating enrollment barriers could further exacerbate the problem of under-enrollment of older adults.

We call on you to swiftly advance a bipartisan farm bill that supports healthy aging and builds on the many successes of our nation's nutrition programs.

Sincerely,

AARP
Alliance for Retired Americans
American Commodity Distribution Association (ACDA)
American Society on Aging
Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historical Black Colleges and Universities
B'nai B'rith International
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
Fair Food Network
Feeding America
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Justice in Aging
LeadingAge
Lutheran Services in America
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Meals on Wheels America

⁷ Senate Special Committee on Aging. *America's Aging Workforce: Opportunities and Challenges*. 2017. <https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Aging%20Workforce%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Household Data Annual Averages: 2017*. 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat31.pdf>

⁹ Senior SNAP Participation Visualization, National Council on Aging, <https://www.ncoa.org/economic-security/benefits/visualizations/senior-snap-participation/>

Medicare Rights Center
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Co-op Grocers
National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care
National Council on Aging
National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)
Society of St. Andrew
The Jewish Federations of North America
Union for Reform Judaism
Volunteers of America
WhyHunger
Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER)