



November 14, 2018

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

The Honorable Mike 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
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

On behalf of our 38 million members and older Americans across the nation, I am writing to express AARP's views on the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. Protecting older Americans from food insecurity is a priority for AARP, and we oppose any effort that would make it harder for older Americans to access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Millions of Americans, including older Americans, rely on SNAP to meet their basic nutritional needs. According to AARP's Public Policy Institute, 8.7 million SNAP households — over 40 percent — had at least one adult aged 50 or older in 2016. SNAP is especially important for older Americans because many face challenges to employment or live on fixed incomes and, therefore, have limited financial resources to spend on necessities like food, housing and essential medicine. Moreover, SNAP participation is associated with reduced hospital and nursing home admissions among older adults, as well as overall reduced health care costs.

AARP supports the improvements made to SNAP that were included in the Senate-passed bill including: allowing states to certify SNAP eligibility for up to 36 months for adults who are elderly or disabled and have no earned income; the additional employment and training opportunities available to individuals on SNAP, including access to training and work opportunities through private employer or nonprofit organization workforce partnerships; and the employment and training pilot projects targeted at specific populations, including people aged 50 and older.

We also support the changes made in both the House and Senate bills to the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) that would require states to certify eligible older Americans for one year and give states the option to certify beyond a one-year period. These changes would ease administrative burdens on states and older Americans.

AARP stands in strong opposition to the expanded work requirements for people aged 50-59 that are included in the House-passed bill. AARP also opposes provisions in the House-passed bill that would lock people out of needed SNAP benefits if they fail to meet or demonstrate that they meet the law's work requirements. It is important to recognize that older Americans face considerable challenges when seeking employment, particularly age discrimination. In addition, older adults often have health issues that make it difficult to work or, in some cases, keep them out of the workforce entirely. While most people who receive SNAP benefits are already working, older Americans who fall out of the labor force, experience longer periods of unemployment compared to younger age groups. Additionally, while the unemployment rate continues to drop nationally, most of the job growth for older workers is in unstable or low-paid jobs, leaving many unable to obtain consistent employment and afford nutritious food.

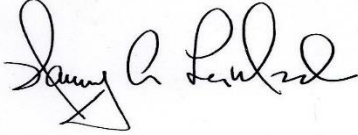
Furthermore, we oppose the changes to categorical eligibility in the House-passed bill that would end food assistance for 400,000 households. Categorical eligibility is essential to improving access to SNAP for low-income Americans of all ages, and it is particularly important considering that nearly 60 percent of older adults who are eligible for SNAP are not enrolled in the program. Creating enrollment barriers and reintroducing significant administrative burdens only exacerbates the under-enrollment of older adults.

We also oppose the expansion of association health plans (AHPs) included in Section 6004 of the House-passed bill. AHPs increase the fragmentation of risk pools which drives 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 based on preexisting conditions, and the requirement to cover essential health benefits.

AARP was 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 the final agreement. Increasingly, many older American households are using broadband to support aging-in-place with, for example, telehealth and distance learning services. Unfortunately, rural communities often do not have reliable broadband connectivity to take advantage of these 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 for a final farm bill agreement. 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