



June 22, 2022

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, FDA & Related Agencies
129 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, FDA & Related Agencies
S-128, The Capitol
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Acting Ranking Member Hoeven:

AARP, on behalf of its nearly 38 million members and all older Americans nationwide, respectfully requests, as you prepare for markup of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for FY 2023, your special attention to funding for various programs critical to the well-being of millions of older Americans.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the nation's largest nutrition assistance program. There are 8.7 million households with at least one adult age 50 or older participating in the program, though many more are eligible. While the program provides a modest benefit—\$142 a month on average, or \$1.56 per meal, —it helps older adults meet their basic food needs. The program reduces food insecurity and poverty and is linked to improved health outcomes. Growing evidence suggests SNAP is associated with fewer inpatient hospitalizations, emergency department visits, and long-term care admissions among older adults. This translates into substantial health care savings. A recent study found that SNAP enrollment was associated with lower Medicaid spending among older adults dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid. Additionally, qualitative interviews found that increased SNAP benefits during the pandemic helped participants purchase healthier food and had a positive impact on their health. Access to an adequate and nutritious diet is foundational to maintaining health, quality of life, and independence as people age. Given the importance of the program, AARP urges the Committee to provide additional protections for SNAP recipients by providing “such sums” appropriations for the fourth quarter of FY 2023 to ensure SNAP does not run out of money.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) works to improve the health of more than 760,000 low-income elderly persons at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with nutritious U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) foods. Over the last fiscal year, CSFP packages experienced a significant increase in cost per box and these costs are not expected to

decline in FY 2022. Additional funding is needed to meet the needs of older adults who are struggling with hunger during the pandemic and as food prices continue to increase. AARP respectfully urges the Committee to provide no less than \$334 million.

According to the Census Bureau, the elderly population in the United States has been growing over the past several years and will continue to grow by an additional 27 percent by 2050. Despite SNAP's importance, seniors have historically had much lower participation rates in the program than other age groups. USDA reports that in FY 2018, only 48 percent of adults ages 60 and older participated in the program under federal income and resource rules. While using federal rules is useful for state comparisons, forthcoming AARP/Mathematica research estimates an even lower FY 2018 participation rate of 29 percent among this age group using state-specific broad-based categorical eligibility rules, which better reflect the actual percentage of those eligible for the program. This means that an estimated 71 percent of the low-income, senior population must rely on other sources of food assistance through food banks and food pantries, and programs such as CSFP.

USDA Rural Housing

AARP also strongly supports the Administration's budget proposal of \$1.564 billion for Rental Assistance to fund the regular renewals and to make permanent the actual Pandemic Emergency Rental Assistance contracts.

AARP further supports the Administration's request for \$50 million for vouchers to ensure continued benefits to existing residents and \$38 million for the development of additional Section 515 multifamily rental housing. Today, more than 420,000 rural families live in housing financed with low-cost Section 515 loans. The average income for Section 515 tenants is \$13,640 annually. More than half of the households are elderly or disabled tenants, 31.2 percent are headed by persons of color and 71.1 percent are headed by women. Ninety-two percent of Section 515 tenants have income less than 50 percent of the area median income.

AARP appreciates the opportunity to comment on these programs of significant importance to older Americans. Should you have any questions regarding these requests, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Timothy Gearan of our Government Affairs staff at 202-434-3803.

Sincerely,



Bill Sweeney
Senior Vice President
Government Affairs