

May 22, 2024

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. Senate

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Glenn "GT" Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations whose missions focus on the health, well-being, and dignity of our nation's growing population of older adults, we urge the House and Senate Agriculture Committees and Congress to prioritize addressing the needs of the 12 million older adults who are threatened by or experience hunger and ensuring the food security for the over 40 million individuals who receive food assistance every day.

A continued commitment to the longstanding bipartisanship around the Farm Bill is crucial for advancing important improvements in anti-hunger programs as well as other key areas impacting America's farms, families, and rural communities. At the most basic level, the Farm Bill should be measured by whether its policies and programs reduce hunger or make the problem worse.

We are deeply concerned about the harmful changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), our nation's most powerful anti-hunger response, in the Farm Bill proposal scheduled for consideration by the House Agriculture Committee. The future cuts to SNAP benefits made by preventing necessary future updates to the Thrifty Food Plan would have a serious impact on food insecure older adults – a population that is rapidly growing and already faces exceptionally high rates of food insecurity. **We urge you to oppose a Farm Bill proposal that makes cuts to future SNAP benefits or includes any harmful policies that would worsen the problem of hunger for America's older adults and other food insecure individuals.**

SNAP is a critical support for the food security and health of millions of older Americans by providing a modest benefit that helps them to put food on the table. SNAP is particularly important for low-income older adults who live on fixed incomes and who face multiple challenges to healthy aging. The average monthly benefit for a senior living alone is \$118 per month, less than \$4 per day in benefits. This modest benefit helps seniors who too often are forced to choose between paying for food, medicine, rent, heat, or other daily costs.

As important as SNAP is, the benefits fall far short of what most households need to access sufficient, nutritious food to enable them to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Future updates to SNAP's Thrifty Food Plan that were authorized in the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill will help to ensure that benefits adjust to factors other than inflation. As America's older adult population continues to grow significantly larger and the challenges and requirements for healthy aging change in unanticipated ways, the future updates to SNAP benefits will be essential to prevent even higher rates of food insecurity.

It is also important to note that older adults' participation in SNAP relative to those who qualify for this important benefit is staggeringly low. Nationally, about 4.8 million older adults aged 60+ are enrolled in SNAP, yet another estimated 5 million eligible older adults are missing out on benefits. Given the under-enrollment of food insecure older adults in SNAP, provisions to maximize benefits, support timely and unbiased benefit outreach, and facilitate enrollment are crucial. Therefore, it is also important that the Farm Bill invests in the workforce helping SNAP beneficiaries and preserves merit staffing to ensure participants can navigate the program and receive full benefits.

When more of our friends, neighbors, and family members are at risk of food insecurity because of cuts to SNAP, added pressure is placed on other programs that are already underfunded, including those that focus on the nutrition and social connection needs of older adults. Food insecure older adults experience lower nutritional intakes and are more likely to suffer from diabetes, depression, limitations in activities of daily living (ADLs), heart disease, asthma, and more. Consequently, these increased healthcare costs are directly passed on to taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid. Our organizations stand united for a Farm Bill that prioritizes food security for all and protects and strengthens access for under-enrolled older adults to the programs and nutrition assistance they need to thrive.

We look forward to working together with you to achieve the successful reauthorization of a Farm Bill that reflects our common values, fulfills our collective responsibility to serve our nation's older adults and the vulnerable among us, and paves the way for a better tomorrow.

Sincerely,

AARP
ADvancing States
Alliance for Retired Americans
Alliance to End Hunger
American Geriatrics Society
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Caring Across Generations
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Church World Service
Coalition on Human Needs
Community Catalyst

Gerontological Society of America
Institute for Policy Studies' Poverty Project
Islamic Relief USA
LeadingAge
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Meals on Wheels America
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)
National AmeriCorps Seniors Association
National Association for Hispanic Elderly
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)
National Association of RSVP Directors
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council on Aging
National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association
National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.
National Recreation and Park Association
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness
The Root Cause Coalition
Tackle Hunger
USAging
Village to Village Network

CC: Members of the House Committee on Agriculture
Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry