

April 21, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

As Americans work to prevent the spread of the COVID -19 disease, including complying with necessary, life-saving social distancing and stay-at-home orders, many of us are struggling to prevent hunger. The investments made by both the Families First Act (H.R. 6201) and the CARES Act (S. 748)¹ are going a long way to prevent hunger, but they are not enough and leave behind certain demographics. Specifically, both Acts have failed to adequately provide for a population of Americans that already experiences hunger at very high rates: College Students.

We are writing to urge you to act immediately to strengthen SNAP for all low-income Americans, including the priority requests of increasing the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent, increasing the minimum benefit to \$30 through the longer-term economic downturn, rather than the immediate public health emergency, and delaying the implementation of proposed and final rules that the Administration has issued for SNAP. In addition to these priority requests, we call on you to also pass a temporary suspension of the rules that deny SNAP to a low-income American solely due to their status as a college student.

One year ago, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report that analyzed more than two dozen studies on food insecurity among college students. They concluded that America's college campuses have high rates of hunger with 39 percent of all low-income students experience food insecurity with approximately 31 percent of those students being first-generation college students. The study also showed that college students experiencing hunger have a harder time succeeding in school. They also found that approximately two million students at risk of going hungry were potentially eligible for food aid through the federal government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) but did not receive the benefit.² This is, in part, due to a provision in federal law which bans the participation of college students who otherwise meet the income eligibility rules in SNAP unless they qualify for an exception such as being connected to work-study or participating in 20 hours of work activity per week.

¹ The Washington Post (April 14, 2020) cites that the Stimulus Checks are largely being used to purchase food: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/14/1200-relief-checks-have-begun-arriving-bank-accounts-people-are-mostly-spending-it-food/>

² "Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits," United States General Accountability Office (GAO) Report to Congressional Requesters (January 2019) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696254.pdf>

The SNAP Student Rule is problematic to begin with,³ but it is especially troubling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many colleges have closed their campuses and expect to remain closed throughout the summer and even the fall semesters.⁴ As college students move off campus and classes move online, on-campus and near-campus jobs have disappeared. What's more, three out of four college students who were expecting summer work experience or employment have seen these slots cancelled amid COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ The loss of jobs and work experience leaves these students without a way to qualify for an exemption to the SNAP Student Rule. While college classes continue, without access to these work-study positions and limited ability to safely work outside the home due to lock-down requirements in nearly every state, withholding nutrition support from this population that already experiences high rates of hunger is cruel and unnecessary.

From the high school graduating class of 2020, who have already lost so much and will face great uncertainty as they enter college to college students hoping to graduate in 2021 in an economy that has been shaken to the bone, our country's college students are suffering great losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The setbacks will be even more significant for those students who are low-income and the first in their families to attend college. We can do better for America's low-income college students, and it should start with, minimally, making sure they don't go hungry.

As you consider which policy reforms to include in the next COVID-19 public health crisis relief legislation, we implore you to include provisions to strengthen SNAP by increasing SNAP allotments, suspending the implementation of proposed cuts to SNAP and temporarily suspending the SNAP Student rule.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ezer Pamintuan, Alameda County Community Food Bank
Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition
Angie Rodgers, Arizona Food Bank Network
Carrie R. Welton, Believe in Students
Heather Valentine, Bread for the World
Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks
Melissa Cannon, California Food Policy Advocates
Maribel Nunez, California Partnership
Randy Hicks, California Disability Rights Inc.

³ The Enhanced Access to SNAP Act (or EATS Act) of 2019 was introduced by Representatives Gomez and Harter and over 50 original co-sponsors to address this problem:

<https://gomez.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=1741>

⁴ New York Post (April 14, 2020): <https://nypost.com/2020/04/15/some-colleges-consider-canceling-in-person-classes-until-2021/>

⁵ Business Insider (Accessed April 15, 2020): <https://www.businessinsider.com/most-college-students-internships-postgraduate-job-placements-canceled-uncertain-study-2020-4>

Kevin Aslanian, Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations
Mark Lowry, CAP OC/Orange County Food Bank
Kelly Bidelman, Center for Civil Justice
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Louise Hayes, Community Legal Services of Philadelphia
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Cathy Senderling-McDonald, County Welfare Director's Association of California
Paul Benz, Faith Action Network - Washington State
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Christopher M. Jones, Florida Legal Services, Inc.
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Sophie Milam, Greater Chicago Food Depository
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Anya Rose and Ashley Wheeland, Hunger Free Colorado
Richard Seckel, Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Hope Nakamura, Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County
Todd Cunningham, Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN)
Robyn Merrill, Maine Equal Justice
Pat Baker and Vicky Negus, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Samuel Chu, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Naomi Sultan, Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc.
Lorianne Burhop, Montana Food Bank Network
Rebecca Gonzales, National Association of Social Workers, CA Chapter
Shelley A. White, New Haven Legal Assistance Association
Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest
Teague González, New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty
Susannah Morgan, Oregon Food Bank
Michelle Benoit, Oregon TRIO Association
Emily Goldman, Partnership for College Completion
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Jennifer Lemmerman, Project Bread
Lauren Hansen, Public Interest Law Project
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Tracy Weatherby, Second Harvest Food Bank of Silicon Valley
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Sue Berkowitz, South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center
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Signe Anderson, Tennessee Justice Center
Sara Goldrick-Rab, The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
Reid Setzer, The Education Trust
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Laura Sylvester and Christina Maxwell, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
Peter Granville, The Century Foundation
Laura Keane, uAspire
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Ellen Katz, William E. Morris Institute for Justice (Arizona)
Sarah Labadie, Women Employed
Jean G. McMurray, Worcester County Food Bank
Kristin McGuire, Young Invincibles

cc: Chairman Pat Roberts, Senate Agriculture Committee
Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow, Senate Agriculture Committee
Chairman Collin Peterson, House Committee Agriculture Committee
Ranking Member K. Michael Conaway, House Agriculture Committee
Chairwoman Marcia Fudge, House Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition Subcommittee
Ranking Member Dusty Johnson, House Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition Subcommittee
Chairman Bobby Scott, House Education & Labor Committee
Ranking Member Virginia Foxx, House Education & Labor Committee
Chairman John Hoeven, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
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Ranking Member Jeff Merkley, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
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Chairman Sanford Bishop, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
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Ranking Member Jeff Fortenberry, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,
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