

May 20th, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
2207 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on
Appropriations
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Appropriations
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Collins, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As Congress works to finalize the Fiscal Year 2024 bill for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, the undersigned anti-hunger organizations write in strong opposition to any language that supports restricting SNAP participants' purchases and eliminates the individual freedom and autonomy required to meet individual household budgets and the specific cultural, nutritional, and dietary needs of families.

The House Agriculture Appropriations bill as reported out of the House Appropriations Committee, included \$2 million for five pilot projects that will restrict SNAP purchases to only those that fall under the "nutrient dense" definition in the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans¹. At the same time, there are efforts to decrease funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) fruit and vegetable benefit, an evidence-based program proven² to increase the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, giving kids a healthier start at life.

The anti-hunger community opposes legislation that encourage restricting SNAP purchases, perpetuating a stereotype rooted in the false narrative that SNAP participants don't know how and cannot be trusted to make healthy choices and that SNAP participation is responsible for high rates of diet-related disease across the country. These policy efforts ignore the fundamental root causes of poor nutrition-- that healthy food is not always accessible or affordable in low-income, rural, and remote areas and communities within food deserts. The administrative burdens created by efforts to restrict SNAP purchasing only increase barriers of SNAP participants, retailers, and already- overwhelmed state agencies. Efficient implementation of these pilots is nearly impossible with over 40,000 SKUs at the average grocery store that must now be examined and categorized according to amorphous guidance. Furthermore, these pilots would subject SNAP participants, specifically low-income families and children, to government-sponsored human studies in exchange for food assistance. This practice is

¹ "Nutrient-dense foods and beverages provide vitamins, minerals, and other health-promoting components and have little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, eggs, beans, peas, and lentils, unsalted nuts and seeds, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, and lean meats and poultry—when prepared with no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium— are nutrient-dense foods." Available at https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf

² Caulfield LE, Bennett WL, Gross SM, et al. Maternal and Child Outcomes Associated With the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) [Internet]. Rockville (MD): Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (US); 2022 Apr. (Comparative Effectiveness Review, No. 253.) Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK579797/> doi: 10.23970/AHRQEPCCER253

unethical, a rejection of data-proven public policy, and a classic example of gross governmental overreach and wasteful spending.

In general, we oppose any efforts to restrict what food items can be purchased with SNAP benefits.

SNAP participants should be able to make purchases based on what is best for themselves and their families. Restricting the use of benefits disregards cultural preferences and dietary needs and ignores the reality of what food and retail options are available in their communities. While we know restrictions on SNAP purchases place an unnecessary administrative and cost burden on the government and participating nationwide SNAP retailers, it would also undermine smaller and independent SNAP retailers that serve defined geographic regions and communities. This undercutting of independent businesses makes it more difficult for small business owners to meet the needs of their entire community, especially those serving rural families, remote areas, and communities within food deserts.

We urge the Appropriations Committee and Congress to address the root causes of food insecurity and its link to health outcomes.

To serve the goal of increasing the nutrition of our communities and avoid the distraction of policing shopping habits, lawmakers should double down on investing in programs that help SNAP participants access healthy food options, offer incentives to purchase healthy foods, and support systems change to address the barriers that undermine economic self-sufficiency. Here are some programs that promote and incentivize healthy choices and improve health outcomes.

- The **WIC fruits and vegetable benefit, Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), and Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)** provides incentives for the increased purchase and consumption of fruits and vegetables.
- **Produce Prescriptions**, public/private partnerships with health care providers, allow physicians to prescribe fruits and vegetables as treatment for chronic diet related conditions.
- The **Double Up Food Bucks Program** matches the value of SNAP benefits on participants' EBT card so they can purchase twice the number of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- The **SNAP-Ed Program** delivers courses that help people learn to stretch their SNAP dollars and shop for and cook healthy meals on a budget.

Studies show that these types of incentives work to increase fruit and vegetable purchases by making produce more affordable. Higher spending on fruits and vegetables promotes healthier diets and reduces the risk of chronic disease among food-insecure adults.³ The average SNAP allotment is just \$6 dollars per day, **\$2 per meal**, and is typically spent within the first half of the month. Incentives that strengthen the purchasing power of SNAP make healthier food more affordable and accessible.

We should work together to explore ways to invest and scale these kinds of programs to increase healthy food consumption by SNAP recipients through more public-private partnerships and policy innovations that support the purchasing power of SNAP benefits while promoting good health.

³ Impact of Produce Prescriptions on Diet, Food Security, and Cardiometabolic Health Outcomes: A Multisite Evaluation of 9 Produce Prescription Programs in the United States

Kurt Hager, PhD, MS, Mengxi Du, MS, MPH, Zhongyu Li, MSPH, Dariush Mozaffarian, MD, DrPH, Kenneth Chui, PhD, Peilin Shi, PhD, Brent Ling, MSPH, Sean B. Cash, PhD, Sara C. Folta, PhD, Fang Fang Zhang, MD, PhD Available at : <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.122.009520>

We must stop scapegoating SNAP households for the high rates of diet-related diseases and tackle this national epidemic together through nationwide strategies and approaches that are equitable and help all communities regardless of their income, race and zip code.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of this letter. Please reach out directly to Minerva Delgado at mdelgado@alliancetoendhunger.org or (202) 688-1139 should you have any questions about policy positions on the Fiscal Year Appropriations bill.

Sincerely, the undersigned organizations, [signatories to date]

Alliance to End Hunger

Bread for the World

Church World Service

Congressional Hunger Center

Feeding America

Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)

Grubhub

Islamic Relief USA

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Meals on Wheels America

RESULTS

Save the Children

Share Our Strength

Shipt

Tackle Hunger: Home of the Souper Bowl of Caring

The Farmlink Project

The Root Cause Coalition