



May 15, 2018

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association and the 50 million students they serve, we strongly urge you to VOTE NO on the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R. 2) and oppose any amendments that further weaken the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This bill makes unnecessary changes to eligibility requirements that could reduce the number of students certified for free school meals. The bill also imposes additional work requirements for adults that will make it harder for some people to get or keep critical nutrition benefits. Votes associated with this issue may be included in NEA's Report Card for the 115th Congress.

The Farm Bill, as this reauthorization is commonly known, provides funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is our nation's largest anti-hunger program. By providing monthly benefits to eligible low-income people to purchase food, SNAP plays a critical role in reducing hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, and improving family security, child and adult health, and employment. SNAP reaches key vulnerable populations — 78 percent of SNAP households include a child, an elderly person, or a person with disabilities; 84 percent of all SNAP benefits go to such households. SNAP lifted 3.6 million Americans out of poverty in 2016, according to the Census Bureau's Supplemental Poverty Measure. By providing much needed economic support, SNAP allows families to have sufficient nutrition during times of unemployment, fluctuating incomes, and low-wage work.

Children living in households that receive SNAP benefits are eligible to receive free school meals. The healthy meals that low-income children receive at school fight hunger, improve academic performance, and help reduce absenteeism, tardiness, and discipline referrals. According to the Food Research and Action Center, linking children in SNAP households to school meals is so important that Congress required *all* school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program to directly certify their students for free school meals.

H.R. 2 undermines the important link between SNAP and free school meals in the 28 states that have chosen a broad based categorical eligibility option under current rules that expands SNAP eligibility to assist working families that still struggle to make ends meet. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), this could impact as many as 265,000 students nationwide. While students could apply for school meals via a burdensome paper process, there is no guarantee that they will still be eligible for the program or recertified in a timely manner. This would cost their families even more when they have just lost SNAP benefits. Further, this puts an enormous administrative burden on schools to revert to a costly paper-based system.

Direct Certification for SNAP also provides the foundation for the Community Eligibility Provision, a hugely successful option that allows over 20,000 high-poverty schools to offer free breakfast and lunch to their students. The provision eliminates the need for schools to collect and process school meal applications, which allows schools to focus on providing healthy and appealing meals instead of processing paperwork. Schools are eligible to implement community eligibility if at least 40 percent of their students are certified to receive free school meals without submitting an application.

Reducing the number of students who are directly certified by changing the rules for broad-based categorical eligibility means that fewer schools will be eligible to implement community eligibility, and many schools that are eligible will find that it is no longer financially viable, because fewer of their meals would be reimbursed at the free rate. This would increase unnecessary paperwork for schools and inhibit student success.

The proposed changes in H.R. 2 to broad-based categorical eligibility will result in working families losing much needed food benefits. It also means that their children could lose free school meals, amplifying the negative impact of the cut. It will mean more children go hungry at home as well as at school.

The bill further imposes aggressive new work requirements, which are unnecessary, unworkable and likely to do more harm than good. It would require SNAP participants ages 18 through 59 who are not disabled or raising a child under 6 to prove — every month — that they're working at least 20 hours a week, participating at least 20 hours a week in a work program, or a combination of the two. These new requirements would force states to develop large new bureaucracies that would need to track millions of SNAP recipients, but likely would do little to boost employment, particularly given that the new funding provided in the bill for job training and work slots would amount to just \$30 per month for those recipients who need a work slot to retain SNAP benefits, according to the CBPP. Further, the requirements would leave low-income people with barriers to employment — such as limited job skills or family members with illness — with neither earnings nor food assistance.

We also have particular concern about amendments filed for Rules Committee consideration that would undermine the nutrition guidelines for school meals programs. These guidelines are currently being implemented in schools, and have already led to increased fruit and vegetable consumption by students. Good nutrition is particularly important for students from low-income families, who may eat as many as half of their calories every day at school. Additionally, USDA has only recently published an interim rule for school meals that provides additional flexibility on the guidelines for schools. These amendments would only add uncertainty to this process and threaten the nutritional quality of the meals offered to students.

We urge you to oppose any amendments that could threaten mandatory safety net programs beyond SNAP, such as Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

The bill further includes \$65 million in loans and grants administered by the Department of Agriculture to support Association Health Plans (AHP) offered through organizations that will

eliminate coverage of essential health benefits (categories of care). These plans may appear to be a less expensive option than current small group market plans that include comprehensive coverage and consumer protections. However, in light of recently proposed rules, AHPs will soon not be required to cover services such as prescription drugs, mental health and maternity care leading to insufficient and inadequate care for children and adults.

We strongly urge you to Vote No on the Farm Bill, any amendments aimed at weakening the healthy guidelines for school meals, and any amendments that make it even more difficult for SNAP participants to receive critical nutrition benefits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Egan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a stylized "E".

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association