



1201 16th St., N.W. | Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: (202) 833-4000

Lily Eskelsen García
President

Rebecca S. Pringle
Vice President

Princess R. Moss
Secretary-Treasurer

John C. Stocks
Executive Director

April 17, 2018

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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), scheduled for markup Wednesday. This bill makes unnecessary changes to certification and eligibility requirements that could reduce the number of students eligible for free school meals. The bill further imposes additional work requirements for adults that could 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 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 this important link in the 28 states that have chosen a broad based eligibility option under current SNAP rules. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), this could impact as many as 265,000 students nationwide.

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. Community eligibility schools are reimbursed based on the poverty within the school.

Reducing the number of students who are directly certified by changing the rules for 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.

The proposed changes in H.R. 2 to categorical eligibility, estimated by the Congressional Budget Office to cut \$5 billion over 10 years, will result in working families losing much needed food benefits. It also means that their children will 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 or food assistance.

We strongly urge you to Vote No on the Farm Bill reauthorization because of the devastating effects it will have on food insecurity for students and working families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association