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February 15, 2023

Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who teach and support nearly 50 million students in communities across America, we are grateful for the committee's February 16 hearing on the 2023 Farm Bill's provisions for nutrition programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). We submit these comments for the record.

NEA members are teachers and education support professionals, including school food service employees, in 14,000 communities nationwide; they know firsthand that hungry students cannot focus on learning. Therefore, we urge you to protect and strengthen SNAP, our nation's largest federal food assistance program and the first line of defense against childhood hunger.

Approximately two-thirds of SNAP households include a child, an older person, or an individual with a disability, [according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#). By providing monthly benefits to eligible low-income individuals, SNAP is crucial in reducing hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, enhancing families' overall sense of security, and improving child and adult health.

We are especially focused on making SNAP benefits more robust because children living in SNAP households are automatically certified to receive free school meals. This is essential, because school meals help fight hunger and promote student health, leading to greater student growth, development, and learning. But given the expiration of USDA waivers for free school meals for all students and the expiration of emergency SNAP allotments, many more children and families are experiencing hunger.

**We can improve food security by:**

**Ensuring benefits reflect the economic hardships families and individuals face.** The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) is based on premises that do not hold true for all families and individuals, including the assumption that all have access to full-service grocery stores that carry fresh produce and whole-grain products. The TFP also assumes healthier foods are affordable and similarly priced across the country—but they are often more costly than foods that are higher in sodium and sugar, and therefore less healthy. By comparison, the **Low-Cost Food Plan** aligns better with household costs, permits greater food variety, and supports healthier diets.

**Removing the shelter deduction cap.** The SNAP shelter deduction does not capture the rising cost of housing and penalizes families and individuals for our current runaway housing market. The current cap of \$623 is a fraction of the actual \$2,000 median rent. Removing this arbitrary cap will allow families to spend more on food.

**Enacting a standard medical-expense deduction.** Only 12 percent of households that are eligible for the medical deduction claim it, despite the high out-of-pocket medical costs many SNAP families face. A standard deduction of at least \$140 would increase recipients' monthly benefit.

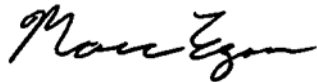
**Extending SNAP benefits to college students.** The rising cost of education, housing, and food is making it more difficult for students to finish college, achieve self-sufficiency, and enter the workforce. Recent studies estimate that as many as [50 percent of college students](#) have experienced food insecurity, while fewer than 40 percent earn a certificate or degree within six years. College students should be placed on equal footing with other eligible SNAP participants by removing the overly burdensome work-study and minimum employment requirements.

**Strengthening food and nutrition security in our most vulnerable communities.** One in four Native Americans experiences food insecurity compared to 1 in 9 Americans overall, according to [Feeding America](#). Currently, individuals who receive benefits from the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) cannot also use SNAP benefits within the same month. This gap in services could be addressed by:

- Permitting the use of SNAP and FDPIR simultaneously;
- Allowing tribal nations to administer SNAP by granting the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) the requisite 638 authority; and
- Increasing funding to expand FDPIR's self-determination projects.

Students' chances for success should not be limited because they lack the nourishment needed for healthy development. All students deserve the support to learn, and having access to robust SNAP benefits will create the conditions for academic engagement and achievement. We urge you to support a strong nutrition Title IV in Farm Bill negotiations.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association