



June 6, 2023

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who teach and support nearly 50 million students in public schools across America, thank you for holding this hearing, “Innovation, Employment, Integrity, and Health: Opportunities for Modernization in Title IV.” We submit these comments for the record.

NEA members are teachers and education support professionals in 14,000 communities nationwide. They know firsthand that hungry students cannot focus on learning. The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 included additional work requirements that place [750,000 adults at risk of losing food assistance](#), according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), placing their families at higher risk for food insecurity as well. Therefore, it is essential that you take steps 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 CBPP](#). Millions of working-age SNAP recipients already work; in fact, a Government Accountability Office analysis of employment data from 11 states found that [70 percent of adult SNAP recipients hold at least one job](#). SNAP serves a crucial role in the lives of these workers, who sometimes hold multiple, low-paying jobs with unreliable hours and scant benefits, or no benefits at all. For them, any unexpected expense, health crisis, or other unforeseen emergency could force a choice between buying groceries, or paying a bill. Among these SNAP recipients are approximately 10 percent of education support professionals and approximately 16 percent of the school food professionals who serve students healthy meals.

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. Children living in SNAP households are automatically certified to receive free school meals, which help fight hunger and promote student health and lead to greater student growth, development, and learning. But, given the expiration of both USDA waivers for free school meals for all students and emergency SNAP allotments, many more children and families are experiencing hunger. Congress must make SNAP benefits more robust so that children can have healthy meals not only at home, but also at school.

NEA members urge you to enhance Title IV and SNAP benefits by:

Ensuring that benefits reflect the economic hardships families and individuals face. SNAP benefits should be based on the **Low-Cost Food Plan**, which better aligns with household costs, permits greater food variety, and supports healthier diets than the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP). TFP is based on premises that do not hold true for all families and individuals, such as the assumption that everyone has 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 these foods are often more costly than foods that are higher in sodium and sugar, and therefore less healthy.

Removing the shelter deduction cap. The current shelter deduction cap of \$623 is a fraction of the actual \$2,000

cost of median rent. This arbitrary cap does not capture the rising cost of housing and penalizes families and individuals for our current runaway housing market. Removing the shelter deduction cap will allow families to spend more on food.

Eliminating the time limits on SNAP eligibility. People who are unemployed and underemployed should not be penalized for being unable to document sufficient hours of work each month.

Enacting a standard medical-expense deduction. A standard medical deduction of at least \$140 would increase recipients' monthly benefit. Currently, 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.

Extending SNAP benefits to college students. Recent studies estimate that as many as [50 percent of college students](#) have experienced food insecurity, and fewer than 40 percent earn a certificate or degree within six years. The rising cost of education, housing, and food is not only pushing more college students into food insecurity; it makes finishing college, achieving self-sufficiency, and entering the workforce more difficult and time-consuming. Removing the overly burdensome work-study and minimum employment requirements on college students would put them on equal footing with other eligible SNAP participants.

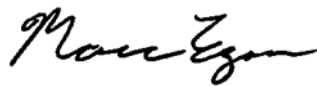
Strengthening food and nutrition security in our most vulnerable communities. One in four Native Americans experiences food insecurity compared to 1 in 9 Americans overall, according to [Feeding America](#). Currently, individuals who receive benefits from the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations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

- Permitting the simultaneous use of SNAP and FDPIR;
- 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.

Granting SNAP assistance to parents with prior drug-related felony convictions. Parents with drug-related felony convictions have paid their dues; they should not be "doubly punished" by being denied assistance to get back on their feet. Meeting their basic food needs with SNAP benefits will help position them—and their children—for success.

Students' opportunity to thrive 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