



April 2, 2018

The Honorable Justin Amash
U.S. House of Representatives
House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Amash:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides important food assistance to more than 40 million people in this country, including 1,375,000 Michigan residents last year. In Michigan, more than 61% of SNAP recipients are in families with children and over 47% are in working families. Conversely, 34% are in families with a person who is elderly or has disabilities and cannot work.

SNAP is available to families and individuals at 130% of the federal poverty level or below. By reducing the amount families need to spend on food and freeing up more household income to spend on other important necessities, the program has brought or kept 326,000 Michigan residents, including 141,000 children, out of poverty in recent years. It is the nation's most important and effective anti-hunger program.

Helping families avoid financial disruptions with a modest average benefit of \$223 per household per month (\$1.37 per person per meal) plays a vital role in preserving the health and well-being of low-income children. One study shows adults who received SNAP as a child having higher high school completion rates and lower rates of stunted growth, obesity and heart disease than those in similar circumstances who did not receive SNAP (Hoynes, Schanzenbach and Almond, 2016). The program has proven to be a smart investment that has long term benefits for children.

In Michigan and across the country, SNAP is the federal means-tested program most responsive to poverty and to downturns in the economy. Year to year, the percentage of the Michigan population receiving food assistance closely mirrors the percentage of workers who are unemployed and underemployed. Likewise, the number of people receiving food assistance has generally risen and fallen with the number in or near poverty. As Michigan has recovered from its worst recession in decades, its SNAP numbers have fallen accordingly.

In addition to helping families and individuals in need, SNAP is good for the economy. In 2016, SNAP recipients in Michigan spent over \$2.16 billion at local supermarkets, convenience stores, farmers' markets and other businesses. Economists estimate that in a weak economy, every SNAP dollar spent on food generates approximately \$1.70 in the local community.

Finally, SNAP has one of the most rigorous payment accuracy systems of any public benefit program, with less than 4% of SNAP dollars issued to ineligible households or in improper amounts. By ensuring that the money is distributed properly and only to those who qualify, the current SNAP system preserves the integrity of the program and of the public funds used to support it.

The Michigan League for Public Policy asks that you continue to build on the strengths of the SNAP program in the following ways:

Oppose More Stringent Work Requirements, and Oppose Eliminating a State's Ability to Waive Work Requirements During Times of High Unemployment

We can all agree that the best way for an able-bodied individual or family to achieve economic security is through work. When an individual remains employed, builds skills and succeeds in the job market, not only does that individual and his or her family benefit, society benefits as that worker spends more at local businesses and pays more in taxes.

Under current law, able-bodied adults age 18 to 50 without dependents are only eligible to receive SNAP for three months out of every three years unless they are working an average of 20 hours per week. States can temporarily waive this time limit for individuals living in areas (counties, cities, or clusters of multiple counties and/or cities) with high unemployment if those areas meet a standard of unemployment set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. However, there have been calls in both the House and the Senate to increase the minimum number of hours worked per week and to eliminate the ability of states to request and receive such waivers.

Imposing more rigid or restrictive work requirements and taking away the ability of states to waive time limits during periods of high unemployment is the wrong way to attain the goal of more SNAP recipients working. Most SNAP recipients are firmly attached to the labor force and often apply for SNAP in between jobs or when their hours are cut. In any given month, an average of 82% of SNAP households with working-age, non-disabled adults are working either that month or within a year of that month. Those not working often face hurdles that can make work extremely difficult, including serious health issues and the need to care for children or family members who are sick or have a disability—challenges that work requirements do nothing to address.

For SNAP recipients who are working, imposing more stringent work requirements during difficult times will not help, but will hinder, their ability to make ends meet while keeping their jobs. Many recipients have low-paying jobs with unreliable hours and limited benefits. When business is slow, their employers might not provide enough hours to meet a fixed weekly requirement, jeopardizing the worker's ability to receive food assistance. Penalizing workers without children who fall below the 20-hour-per-week work requirement in times of economic downturn will not help those workers find better, more stable employment, but will pull the rug from under them as they try to weather the storms.

Maintain State Flexibility for Devising Work and Training Programs Under SNAP

There has been some discussion in Congress of requiring states to design programs in order to provide work or training opportunities for all recipients who are not meeting their work requirements. For each state to construct a new system to assess individuals' ability to work and their training needs, as well as to assign and track individuals to appropriate placements, would be a massive undertaking at considerable cost to the states and to the federal SNAP program. No comparable employment and training system exists that could be leveraged to generate this many job or training slots for so many people in every community across the country.

Currently, states receive money through a federal funding stream called SNAP Education and Training with which to help SNAP recipients become skilled and find permanent work. This funding stream is sometimes mingled with other public and private funds to increase efficiency and build the capacity of existing programs that serve both SNAP recipients and non-recipients. We urge you to continue giving states this flexibility and to increase state allocations under SNAP Education and Training, rather than giving states separate money to build a large and unproven separate program for SNAP recipients.

Protect SNAP from Deep Funding Cuts

There has been a desire expressed by some in both the House and the Senate to make deep funding cuts to SNAP, which would reduce benefits for some recipients and eliminate them entirely for others. Please maintain current funding or, better yet, increase it in order to update monthly benefits to keep pace with food expenses.

Protect the Double Up Food Bucks Program

Double Up Food Bucks encourages low-income individuals and families to consume healthy, fresh produce by working with local farmers' markets to help recipients' SNAP benefit dollars go twice as far in the purchase of such produce. The program requires a match from the state, which can include private philanthropic funds, and benefits local farmers and well as the individuals and families buying the produce. Please protect this program from cuts or elimination.

Reject Any Attempt to Eliminate Categorical Eligibility

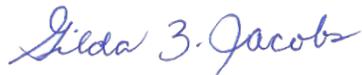
Many working families have gross incomes just above SNAP's income limit of 130% of the poverty line, but face significant expenses such as housing and childcare that can put a healthy diet out of reach. More than 40 states, including Michigan, use the broad-based categorical eligibility option to soften the "benefit cliff" that occurs as households are cut off after exceeding the maximum income eligibility level. It allows states to raise income cutoffs and ease asset limits based on providing households a benefit funded through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant, reducing administrative complexity and cost.

In an average month, almost two million individuals in about one million low-income households nationwide receive food assistance as a result of categorical eligibility, and around 90% of this option's benefits go to working households. However, there is a proposal in the U.S. House to eliminate broad-based categorical eligibility and there may be similar amendments put forth in the Senate's Farm Bill. Eliminating this option would not only take away food assistance from many struggling working families, but also result in hundreds of thousands of low-income students in SNAP households losing access to free school meals. Please help to protect food assistance for struggling families who move above the income eligibility limit by opposing any attempt to eliminate broad-based categorical eligibility.

We urge you to protect SNAP in the Farm Bill. Its modest benefits lift millions of individuals, including children, out of poverty and ensure that low income Americans can afford an adequate diet. The program responds effectively to poverty and need, has strong integrity and strengthens local economies.

Please call me if you have any questions.

Warmest regards,



Gilda Z. Jacobs
President and CEO