



November 6, 2013

Honorable Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Stabenow:

As you prepare to negotiate a Farm Bill in the next several weeks, we the undersigned wanted to express our thanks for your strong leadership on behalf of Michigan's most vulnerable families. Your previous efforts to protect programs that serve the needs of low-income Michigianians are greatly appreciated.

As you and your colleagues begin work in earnest on a bipartisan Farm Bill conference agreement, we wanted to share our deep concerns with the *Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act* (H.R. 3102), formerly a stand-alone bill that has now been joined to the House-passed Farm only bill. This bill proposes over \$39 billion in cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which will harm vulnerable children, working poor families, seniors, poor veterans, and many jobless men and women in states (such as Michigan) with high unemployment. Our hope is that you will help ensure that any final Farm Bill rejects the House's deep cuts, along with the extremely damaging provisions that effectively cut-off unemployed adults and parents, along with their families, from SNAP.

As negotiations on a Farm Bill take place, we respectfully request that you prioritize the welfare of struggling families and protect their access to food assistance. We also ask that you especially oppose the following provisions that are part of the House-passed bill:

- **Section 109**, which eliminates the option states currently have to waive work requirements for jobless abled-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) in areas of high unemployment. If this waiver is eliminated, **200,000 unemployed very poor adults in Michigan** face the likely prospect that they will be left without access to healthy foods, even if they are doing all they can to find employment or job training.
- **Section 139, based on Rep. Steve Southerland's amendment.** Under this provision, the benefits of entire families (including those with children as young as

1 year old and those with elementary school aged children who do not have access to safe and affordable afterschool care for their children) would be at risk of termination if the parents in those families cannot find jobs or are not participating in work training for at least 20 hours per week. Even those adults who are willing and able to work, but who have been unable to secure a job or training program, would be affected.

Not only is this section of the bill particularly cruel to households struggling with unemployment and food insecurity, but it also gives states a financial incentive to remove families from their food assistance programs, and punishes those states that decline to change their work requirements. As a reward for compliance, section 139 allows states to keep up to half of the expected savings from ending SNAP for unemployed households, and to use that money *for any purpose they choose* – including subsidies and tax cuts for profitable businesses. As a penalty for refusing to adopt this cruel provision, non-complying states would lose all federal matching funds for job training and support programs.

- **Section 105**, which would eliminate food assistance eligibility based on expanded categorical eligibility. As you are aware, through categorical eligibility, low-income households with gross incomes or assets modestly above the federal SNAP limits can qualify for food assistance – particularly working households with high child care or housing costs. Michigan is one of the more than 40 states taking advantage of this option. If the categorical eligibility option is eliminated, 1.8 million needy individuals would lose access to food assistance, and an estimated 210,000 children would lose free school meals.
- **Section 107**, which restricts states' ability to simplify paperwork in determining household benefit levels by using receipt of federal energy assistance to document utility expenses (also known as the "heat-and-eat" program). The households most affected by this provision would include low-income seniors, people with disabilities, and working-poor families with children.
- **Rep. Tom Reed's amendment**, which would permanently ban ex-offenders from receiving SNAP benefits. This provision would penalize even those former felons who paid their debt to society in full, and have led a life free of crime since their release. This amendment not only punishes ex-offenders, but also their minor dependents.

As you are aware, food assistance to struggling Michigan families was cut by \$183 million on November 1st, when a temporary provision of the 2009 Recovery Act expired. The pain these families are starting to feel from the end of the ARRA boost will be exacerbated by the new cuts proposed by the House leadership. This is simply the wrong thing to do at a time when unemployment remains high in the state, poverty affects 1 out of 4 Michigan children, and food insecurity in the state remains elevated at 18%.

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We thank you for your long record of public service to the state of Michigan and urge you to reject the House's proposed harmful cuts to food assistance.

Sincerely,

Access of West Michigan
The A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI)
The Arc Michigan
The Arc of Midland
Cancer Services
Capuchin Soup Kitchen
Center for Civil Justice
Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM)
The Disability Network – Flint
Fair Food Network
Food Bank Council of Michigan
Food Bank of South Central Michigan
Food Council of Ottawa County
Food Gatherers
Forgotten Harvest
Free Clinics of Michigan
The Greater Lansing Food Bank
Homeless Action Network of Detroit
Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes
Michigan Alliance of TimeBanks
Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness
Michigan Community Action Agency Association
Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council
Michigan Disability Rights Coalition
Michigan Farmers Market Association
Michigan Farmers Union
Michigan League for Public Policy
Michigan's Children
Mustard Seed Shelter
PHI – Midwest Office
Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Michigan
Progress Michigan
Saginaw County Community Action Committee
Sugar Law Center for Economic & Social Justice
United Way for Southeastern Michigan
Washtenaw County Human Services Board

cc: Michigan Delegation