April 21, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell

Majority Leader

U.S. Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Speaker

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer

Minority Leader

U.S. Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy

Minority Leader

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

As Americans work to prevent the spread of the COVID -19 disease, including complying with necessary, life-saving social distancing and stay-at-home orders, many of us are struggling to prevent hunger. The investments made by both the Families First Act (H.R. 6201) and the CARES Act (S. 748)[[1]](#footnote-1) are going a long way to prevent hunger, but they are not enough and leave behind certain demographics. Specifically, both Acts have failed to adequately provide for a population of Americans that already experiences hunger at very high rates: College Students.

We are writing to urge you to act immediately to strengthen SNAP for all low-income Americans, including the priority requests of increasing the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent, increasing the minimum benefit to $30 through the longer-term economic downturn, rather than the immediate public health emergency, and delaying the implementation of proposed and final rules that the Administration has issued for SNAP. In addition to these priority requests, we call on you to also pass a temporary suspension of the rules that deny SNAP to a low-income American solely due to their status as a college student.

One year ago, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report that analyzed more than two dozen studies on food insecurity among college students. They concluded that America’s college campuses have high rates of hunger with 39 percent of all low-income students experience food insecurity with approximately 31 percent of those students being first-generation college students. The study also showed that college students experiencing hunger have a harder time succeeding in school. They also found that approximately two million students at risk of going hungry were potentially eligible for food aid through the federal government’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) but did not receive the benefit.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is, in part, due to a provision in federal law which bans the participation of college students who otherwise meet the income eligibility rules in SNAP unless they qualify for an exception such as being connected to work-study or participating in 20 hours of work activity per week.

The SNAP Student Rule is problematic to begin with,[[3]](#footnote-3) but it is especially troubling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many colleges have closed their campuses and expect to remain closed throughout the summer and even the fall semesters.[[4]](#footnote-4) As college students move off campus and classes move online, on-campus and near-campus jobs have disappeared. What’s more, three out of four college students who were expecting summer work experience or employment have seen these slots cancelled amid COVID-19 pandemic.[[5]](#footnote-5) The loss of jobs and work experience leaves these students without a way to qualify for an exemption to the SNAP Student Rule. While college classes continue, without access to these work-study positions and limited ability to safely work outside the home due to lock-down requirements in nearly every state, withholding nutrition support from this population that already experiences high rates of hunger is cruel and unnecessary.

From the high school graduating class of 2020, who have already lost so much and will face great uncertainty as they enter college to college students hoping to graduate in 2021 in an economy that has been shaken to the bone, our country’s college students are suffering great losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The setbacks will be even more significant for those students who are low-income and the first in their families to attend college. We can do better for America’s low-income college students, and it should start with, minimally, making sure they don’t go hungry.

As you consider which policy reforms to include in the next COVID-19 public health crisis relief legislation, we implore you to include provisions to strengthen SNAP by increasing SNAP allotments, suspending the implementation of proposed cuts to SNAP and temporarily suspending the SNAP Student rule.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ezer Pamintuan, Alameda County Community Food Bank

Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition

Angie Rodgers, Arizona Food Bank Network

Carrie R. Welton, Believe in Students

Heather Valentine, Bread for the World

Andrew Cheyne, California Association of Food Banks

Melissa Cannon, California Food Policy Advocates

Maribel Nunez, California Partnership

Randy Hicks, California Disability Rights Inc.

Kevin Aslanian, Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations

Mark Lowry, CAP OC/Orange County Food Bank

Kelly Bidelman, Center for Civil Justice

Elizabeth Odunsi, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Louise Hayes, Community Legal Services of Philadelphia

Chaer Robert and Sara J. Lipowitz, Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Cathy Senderling-McDonald, County Welfare Director’s Association of California

Paul Benz, Faith Action Network - Washington State

Vince Hall, Feeding San Diego

Christopher M. Jones, Florida Legal Services, Inc.

Cassidie Carmen Bates, Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano

Heidi McHugh, Food for People, the Food Bank for Humboldt County

Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline

Ellen Vollinger, Food Research and Action Center

Iris Aguilar, Foundation for California Community Colleges

Sophie Milam, Greater Chicago Food Depository

Alison M. Weir, Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Emily Bouck West, Higher Learning Advocates

Kimberly Drew, Heartland Alliance

Frank Tamborello, Hunger Action LA

Anya Rose and Ashley Wheeland, Hunger Free Colorado

Richard Seckel, Kentucky Equal Justice Center

Hope Nakamura, Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County

Todd Cunningham, Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN)

Robyn Merrill, Maine Equal Justice

Pat Baker and Vicky Negus, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Samuel Chu, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Naomi Sultan, Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc.

Lorianne Burhop, Montana Food Bank Network

Rebecca Gonzales, National Association of Social Workers, CA Chapter

Shelley A. White, New Haven Legal Assistance Association

Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest

Teague González, New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty

Susannah Morgan, Oregon Food Bank

Michelle Benoit, Oregon TRIO Association

Emily Goldman, Partnership for College Completion

Annie Kirschner, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon

Jennifer Lemmerman, Project Bread

Lauren Hansen, Public Interest Law Project

Mary Ignatius, Parent Voices California

Meg Davidson, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank

Tracy Weatherby, Second Harvest Food Bank of Silicon Valley

Jeremy Rosen, Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Sue Berkowitz, South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center

Robb Friedlander, Swipe Out Hunger

Signe Anderson, Tennessee Justice Center

Sara Goldrick-Rab, The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice

Reid Setzer, The Education Trust

Dr. Elisha Smith Arrillaga, The Education Trust—West

Laura Sylvester and Christina Maxwell, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

Peter Granville, The Century Foundation

Laura Keane, uAspire

Varsha Sarveshwar, University of California Student Association

Colleen Laing, United Way of King County

Suzanna Martinez, University of California San Francisco

Adam Saltsman, Urban Action Institute, Worcester State University

Jessica Radbord, Vermont Legal Aid

Jan Yoshiwara, Washington State Board for Community and Technical

Jessica Bartholow, Western Center on Law and Poverty

Ellen Katz, William E. Morris Institute for Justice (Arizona)

Sarah Labadie, Women Employed

Jean G. McMurray, Worcester County Food Bank

Kristin McGuire, Young Invincibles

cc: Chairman Pat Roberts, Senate Agriculture Committee

Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow, Senate Agriculture Committee

Chairman Collin Peterson, House Committee Agriculture Committee

Ranking Member K. Michael Conaway, House Agriculture Committee

Chairwoman Marcia Fudge, House Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition Subcommittee

Ranking Member Dusty Johnson, House Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition Subcommittee

Chairman Bobby Scott, House Education & Labor Committee

Ranking Member Virginia Foxx, House Education & Labor Committee

Chairman John Hoeven, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural

Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Ranking Member Jeff Merkley, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural

Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Chairman Sanford Bishop, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural

Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Ranking Member Jeff Fortenberry, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,

Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

1. The Washington Post (April 14, 2020) cites that the Stimulus Checks are largely being used to purchase food: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/14/1200-relief-checks-have-begun-arriving-bank-accounts-people-are-mostly-spending-it-food/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits,” United States General Accountability Office (GAO) Report to Congressional Requesters (January 2019) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696254.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Enhanced Access to SNAP Act (or EATS Act) of 2019 was introduced by Representatives Gomez and Harter and over 50 original co-sponsors to address this problem: <https://gomez.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=1741> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. New York Post (April 14, 2020): <https://nypost.com/2020/04/15/some-colleges-consider-canceling-in-person-classes-until-2021/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Business Insider (Accessed April 15, 2020): <https://www.businessinsider.com/most-college-students-internships-postgraduate-job-placements-canceled-uncertain-study-2020-4> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)