August 8, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
The U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are writing to oppose the disastrous rule to revise the use of broad-based categorical eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which will make it harder for millions of families to get the nutrition assistance they need. If enacted, the Trump Administration’s own analysis of this rule estimates that 3.1 million people — nearly nine percent of SNAP recipients — would lose their benefits. No one should go hungry in the United States of America.

This plan would disproportionately punish working families who are already struggling to put food on the table and make ends meet. Today, more than 13 million American children live in poverty, more than one in five people experiencing homelessness are children, and the United States has the highest youth poverty rate and infant mortality rate among comparable nations. Currently, 84 percent of SNAP benefits go to households with children, seniors, or a person with a disability, and 50 percent of children will receive SNAP at some point in their childhoods.¹

Families with children are more likely to face food insecurity, and in 2017, the number of families facing food insecurity rose for the first time since the Great Recession.² Access to SNAP has been shown to improve health and educational outcomes for school children.³ Additionally, schools rely on SNAP enrollment when determining eligibility for free school meals, so households could be penalized twice: once with the loss of household SNAP benefits and again with the loss of free school meals for children. In fact, USDA estimates 500,000 children will lose their automatic eligibility for free school meals.⁴

---
A recent study from the Urban Institute found that the average cost of a low-income meal was 27 percent higher than the maximum benefit. In order to cover the cost of food, USDA would need to increase the average benefit by about $46.50 per person per month. In addition, the USDA’s estimate of how much low-income families should spend on food relies on unrealistic assumptions of food access and the amount of time low-income families have available to prepare meals.

Moreover, families must already go through a robust vetting process to verify income eligibility. USDA’s assertion that families can simply receive an informational brochure in order to qualify for SNAP is simply not true. Perpetuating this lie breeds distrust in a successful program that lifted 8.4 million people out of poverty in 2015. USDA also erroneously asserts that higher income individuals take advantage of SNAP benefits. In reality, fraud is virtually nonexistent in this program; just 0.2 percent of benefits mistakenly go to households with net incomes above the poverty line. Further, there are many more people who qualify for SNAP that are not enrolled in the program. USDA’s resources would be better spent focusing on increasing participation among all who are eligible, rather than trying to limit participation among people who are already struggling.

In a nation where the three wealthiest people own more wealth than the bottom half, increasing the barriers for hungry families is unconscionable. Last year, the United Nations report by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights noted that “in a rich country like the United States, the persistence of extreme poverty is a political choice made by those in power.” With this proposal you are once again doubling down on that choice.

---

6 Ibid.
Millions of families will go hungry if your administration moves forward with this policy. We urge you to immediately rescind this shortsighted proposal. Thank you for your careful consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress
Brian Higgins  
Member of Congress

C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger  
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Member of Congress

Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

Raul M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

Bradley S. Schneider  
Member of Congress

Susan Wild  
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress

Katie Hill  
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress
The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Page 7

Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress

David Trone
Member of Congress

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

Al Green
Member of Congress
Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress

David Price
Member of Congress

John A. Yamuth
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

David Scott
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

Stacey E. Plaskett
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

James R. Langevin
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress