

May 18, 2020

Dear Senator:

With increasing numbers of people facing hunger each day, it is imperative that Congress immediately strengthen the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). We are grateful for the improvements that were enacted in previous COVID-19 response bills, however we continue to see rising numbers of Americans facing hunger without adequate support.

Programs like USDA's new "Farm to Fork" initiative simply cannot fully meet the growing need at this moment, which is expected to grow as unemployment and economic hardship increase. While food pantries and distribution sites are clearly a vital resource for families that struggle with food insecurity, they cannot address the full scope of hunger — now, more than ever.

Increasing SNAP will not only help families put food on the table — it will also help stimulate our economy and contribute to national recovery. SNAP has proven time and again to be one of the most effective mechanisms to reach low-income households and quickly inject money into the economy.

The only way to truly meet the needs of all those facing hunger is for the federal government to immediately strengthen SNAP until the economy can fully recover by:

- boosting SNAP maximum benefits by 15%,
- increasing the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30, and
- suspending all SNAP administrative rule changes.

Faith leaders representing a broad arrange of religious traditions and beliefs are united in calling for urgent action to prioritize SNAP:

Joyce Ajlouny, General Secretary, American Friends Service Committee:

"The COVID-19 outbreak has had a devastating impact on the food security of low wage workers, the newly unemployed, students who can't attend school, and seniors. It's an inarguable and moral imperative for Congress to increase food assistance at this time."

Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World:

"As the economic fallout from COVID-19 worsens, millions of Americans are finding themselves unable to feed their families — many for the first time. And those who are most vulnerable, such as the elderly, people suffering from chronic health conditions, and people of color, will struggle all the more to recover from the devastating impacts. A significant increase to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits is needed to address this hunger crisis. We urge Congress to increase the maximum benefits by 15 percent to ensure families facing this crisis receive the nutrition they need. Now is the time to heed God's call to care for the 'least among us' and all those who are suffering."

Rev. Martin Shupack, Director of Advocacy, Church World Service:

“Millions in America who even before COVID-19 were one paycheck away from poverty are now joining the ranks of the unemployed. They rely on the SNAP safety net to feed their families. In the spirit of the Easter season, Church World Service urges the White House and Congress to include SNAP funding increases in the new relief package so that “none have any need’ (Acts 4:34), and “the hungry are filled with good things’ (Luke 1:53).”

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston, Director, Disciples Center for Public Witness, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ):

“SNAP is not merely another government program: It is an ethically grounded social covenant between the American people as a whole and those within this nation who are struggling economically,” said the Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston, Executive Director of the Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ). “This being the case, SNAP must be included in any crisis-oriented legislation dealing with economic relief, especially the current bills responding to the coronavirus pandemic.”

Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

“The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is an essential backstop against hunger to meet the extraordinary increase in need during this public health pandemic and related economic crisis. Strengthening SNAP is a significant way we can make sure all our neighbors can eat and stay healthy during a time of loss in income and soaring unemployment.”

Steve Schneck, Executive Director, Franciscan Action Network:

“Pope Francis continually decries the “throwaway culture.” Too often in this country, those receiving government benefits are viewed as disposable. President Trump has already tightened SNAP requirements. Now, we’re seeing pandemic stimulus packages that put corporations first, instead of those who need it most. In the next stimulus package, it is absolutely crucial that money is included for SNAP recipients. At a time when those on the margins need it most, we must not leave them behind. People need to be put first, instead of profits.”

Diane Randall, General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation:

“Our common humanity in this global pandemic lays bare the moral imperative of meeting human needs. Food is an essential human need, and the SNAP program is the most effective way for millions of people in our country who are hungry and suffering to put food on the table. Congress must act now to increase SNAP benefits to prevent rampant hunger in the United States as peoples’ income diminishes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Sharif Aly, Chief Executive Officer, Islamic Relief USA:

"During times of crisis, a people and nation are judged on how they protect those who are most vulnerable. A quarter of all households exhaust their SNAP benefits within a week of receiving them, and more than half exhaust those benefits within the first two weeks. The economic consequences of COVID-19 have increased unemployment, reducing available opportunities to secure income for millions of people. Islamic Relief USA calls on Congress to take swift action to increase the monthly and per meal SNAP benefits, and to suspend any rules that would prohibit access for families in need. More people will rely on SNAP for the time being to fulfill their nutritional needs. It's imperative that we do our best as a nation to ensure the food security of our most vulnerable communities.”

Abby J. Leibman, President & CEO, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger:

“Jewish tradition is based on the understanding that we are all responsible for one another, particularly in the darkest times. It is not only essential to expand access and increase benefits for SNAP — it is urgent. Without immediate action from our nation’s leaders, we will see countless Americans thrown into dire circumstances and needlessly suffering from hunger. COVID-19 has exposed the gaping holes in our country’s safety net, as it becomes evident why programs like SNAP are essential. Boosting SNAP benefits will not only help people put food on the table — it will also stimulate the economy and contribute to a faster national recovery.”

Lawrence E. Couch, Director, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd:

"In the midst of a nationwide pandemic, we all journey together. Because of economic inequalities, some of us are more deeply impacted than others. Simple justice demands that we offer those in need sufficient resources to provide food for themselves and their families. Without adequate nutrition, a child's physical and mental health can be permanently damaged. No one in the United States should go hungry when we have the means to prevent it."

Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice:

"As chaos roils our economy and a quarter of our workforce loses their jobs, we as a nation must ensure that our people can eat to sustain themselves through this crisis. Congress has a successful and well-established program to meet the urgent needs of food insecure households: SNAP. SNAP is a lifeline anytime, but now we need to increase the benefits that families receive. As food pantries are shuttered or overwhelmed by need, the Senate must acknowledge the urgency of millions of people going hungry. Now is the time to take up legislation that increases the basic SNAP benefits and expands access to nutrition assistance. It is a moral call to care for those most impacted in this time."

Wardah Khalid, President, Poligon:

"In the Islamic faith, our values and tradition include providing food for the hungry. Food is a basic human need and we must ensure that vulnerable communities have their needs met by expanding SNAP benefits. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'He who sleeps on a full stomach whilst his neighbour goes hungry is not one of us.' We call on members of Congress to include expanding SNAP benefits for those who need it in the next COVID-19 relief package. Families need support during this time, and expanding SNAP will provide much-needed relief."

Rev. Jimmie R. Hawkins, Director, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness:

“It is of vital importance that an increase in SNAP benefits is included in the next round of COVID-19 legislation. Benefits are already shockingly low, which causes families to be unable to acquire the minimal amount of food that they need. Ensuring access to food is a basic necessity, and the least we can do to support children and families who are suffering due to no fault of their own. We can do better, we must do better. It is in such a time as this that God demands our greatest level of compassion, empathy and support. It is not enough to ensure that small businesses survive the pandemic. Our first priority must be the health and well-being of every person in the United States of America. People are

hungry and deserve any assistance we can give them so that, of all the concerns they have, having something to eat is not one of them.”

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism:

“During these uncertain times, we must prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable. As Jews, we are motivated by the mandate in Isaiah 58:7 to “share your bread with the hungry.” Congress should increase SNAP benefits to ensure that all families have food on the table every day so they can maintain their wellbeing during this public health emergency. SNAP feeds those who are hungry, and this program should be a priority for all Americans during this crisis.”

Sandy Sorensen, Director, United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries:

“SNAP is a proven, effective, assistance program enabling thousands of families to access the nutrition they need in these challenging times. It would be unconscionable not to strengthen this program in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when it is needed more than ever. As people of faith, we know that the well-being of all us depends on how we care for our most vulnerable communities. We urge Congress to include an increase in SNAP benefits in the next COVID-19 relief package.”