

July 9, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations
US Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Committee on
Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Chair Cole, Vice Chair Collins and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As Congress begins its work on the Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) bill for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, the undersigned organizations write in strong support of maintaining the current level of dietary choice available to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants. We encourage you to reject any language that would restrict, through pilots or otherwise, the ability for SNAP participants to make the best dietary choices for themselves and their families.

SNAP restrictions would significantly increase the role of the federal government in deciding which foods are acceptable to eat for families participating in SNAP. The food system is complex and individual food items would need to be catalogued and evaluated by USDA for nutrient criteria, communicated in real time with states and retailers so that this product list could be electronically included in a retail point of sale (POS) system, and then enforced by USDA. The required resources to oversee which food products consumers are allowed to purchase at the state and federal level would detract from the essential program administration duties.

There is a false premise that SNAP contributes to diet-related disease or increases healthcare costs. In fact, SNAP improves health outcomes and decreases healthcare costs. Several studies have evaluated the impact of SNAP on healthcare spending. SNAP, with its current level of dietary flexibility and choice, is associated with reduced health care spending among American adults with low income. Children who participate in SNAP have better health status than their eligible nonparticipating peers and are less likely to reside in households that forgo health care in lieu of other household necessities.¹ Adults who had access to SNAP during childhood exhibit lower adult obesity risk and other lower risk of chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes.² One study concluded that encouraging SNAP enrollment among eligible adults may help reduce healthcare costs in the United States.³

¹ Ettinger de Cuba S, Weiss I, Pasquariello J, et al. The SNAP Vaccine: Boosting Children's Health. *Children's HealthWatch*, February 1, 2012, <https://drexel.edu/hunger-free-center/research/briefs-and-reports/snap-vaccine/>.

² Joyce KM, Breen A, Ettinger de Cuba S, et al. Household Hardships, Public Programs, and Their Associations with the Health and Development of Very Young Children: Insights From Children's Healthwatch. *J Appl Res Child*. (n.d.)

³ [↗](#) Seth A. Berkowitz *et al.*, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation and Health Care Expenditures Among Low-Income Adults," *JAMA Internal Medicine*, November 2017, https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/article-abstract/2653910?amp%3butm_source=JAMA+Intern+MedPublishAheadofPrint&utm_campaign=25-09-2017;

Government control of food choices is challenging for retailers to implement and negatively impacts the customer experience. SNAP, especially when compared with other federal programs, is defined by its efficiency, autonomy, and dignity. SNAP was designed to reduce food insecurity by providing customers with a broad range of food choices that allow customers to address dietary, religious, or cultural needs without interference. SNAP is available in 262,000 authorized retail stores nationwide. These retail locations ensure that SNAP benefits have an economic impact in the communities where participants live. This increases food access, not just for individuals with low-income, but also for communities where SNAP participation may make the difference for a retailer in keeping its store open.

In a recent poll, most likely voters agree that the government should not interfere with people's food choices (65%) or take away people's autonomy by adding even more limitation to their choices (73%)⁴. In an additional 2022 survey of individuals facing hunger, 87% agreed that if Congress passes policies to reduce hunger and food insecurity, it is important that these policies support people's dignity and choices in what they feed their families.⁵ Restricting options in SNAP removes autonomy and dignity by limiting the ability to make personal choices about one's diet, including foods that are culturally appropriate or meet dietary restrictions. SNAP recipients, like all people, should be trusted and empowered to make their own food selections.

SNAP restriction pilots are complex and would pose similar challenges to outright restrictions for retailers and SNAP participants. For these reasons, we urge opposition to SNAP restrictions pilots as you complete your work on FY25 Appropriations.

While we know SNAP improves health outcomes, should Congress want to support additional tools to improve those outcomes, there are alternatives to restrictions with proven efficacy such as benefit adequacy, SNAP-Ed and incentive programs like the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, Healthy Fluid Milk Incentives, and more.

We encourage Congress to preserve the level of choice that allows SNAP participants to address their dietary needs and reject restrictions.

Sincerely,

American Bakers Association
American Frozen Food Institute
Alliance to End Hunger
American Beverage Association
Can Manufacturers Institute
Congressional Hunger Center
Consumer Brands Association
Equitable Spaces
Feeding America

⁴ Perry Udem, "Farm Bill: A National Survey of Likely 2024 Voters," Prepared for Feeding America, October 2023. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/farm-bill-poll>

⁵ "Policy Solutions to End Hunger in America | Feeding America – 2022 Elevating Voices to End Hunger Together Report." Sept. 2022, https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Resource_Feeding-America-Policy-Recommendations_WH-Conference-on-Hunger-Nutrition-and-Health_July-2022.pdf

FoodFinder, Inc.
Food Research and Action Center
FMI – The Food Industry Association
Islamic Relief USA
International Dairy Foods Association
National Association of Convenience Stores
National Confectioners Association
National Grocers Association
National Milk Producers Federation
National Retail Federation
North American Millers' Association
Save the Children
Share Our Strength
SNAC International
United Food and Commercial Workers