

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

August 4, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We are writing today to first thank you for your leadership in addressing the hunger crisis the United States is currently facing by convening the first White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health (the Conference) in 50 years, and second, to respectfully request that the Conference consider certain policy proposals concerning the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Despite being one of the wealthiest nations in the world, the United States is experiencing a growing hunger crisis. In 2020, over 38 million Americans, including 12 million children, lived in food-insecure households.¹ This means that at times a family was unable to acquire adequate food for one or more household members because they did not have enough money and other resources for food.² And though this crisis is not new—between the COVID-19 pandemic and rising prices due to inflation—it is getting worse. It is more urgent than ever that we ensure SNAP reflects the current cost of food and eliminate the existing barriers to accessing the program.

We also must be particularly mindful of the territories of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands, which have even higher rates of food insecurity than the lower 48 states. For example, despite the recent increase in Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) benefit amounts for Puerto Rico through American Rescue Plan funding, the current disparity between maximum household benefits for Puerto Rico versus the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia ranges from 21-24 percent based on household size. Further, without additional NAP funding, that disparity is projected to jump to 44 percent per household.

In light of the increasingly dire food insecurity millions of Americans are currently experiencing, we respectfully request that the Conference take into consideration the below policy proposals that are laid out in the *Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2021*:

¹ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/#insecure>

² [USDA ERS - Measurement](#)

- Increase SNAP benefits—which are only an average of \$5.45 per person per day, without including COVID-19 aid—to ensure that they provide truly adequate support to families in need of food assistance. If a recession occurs as predicted by many economists, SNAP will continue to function as a stimulus package, helping stabilize the economy during any potential downturn. In fact, each \$1 in SNAP benefits spent during economic downturns generates between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity, making an increase in benefits particularly effective for both the households they support, as well as the broader economy.³
- Permanently authorize and expand SNAP’s standard medical deduction, allowing households with older adults and people with disabilities to deduct a standard amount—up to \$140 in Fiscal Year 2022—of their medical costs. By helping individuals claim deductions more easily, without unnecessary paperwork, Congress can better address our country’s “hunger cliff.”⁴
- Remove the cap on the excess shelter deduction to allow households to deduct any shelter expenses and utilities that exceed 50 percent of their income after all other deductions have been applied. As many Americans struggle to keep up with rising housing and energy costs, eliminating the shelter deduction cap—currently only \$597—would make it easier for households, particularly in high cost-of-living areas, to receive the nutrition assistance they need.⁵
- Eliminate the 3-month time limit on benefits for non-elderly adults without children in their homes, or “able-bodied adults without dependents”. While these households would still be subject to SNAP’s general work requirement, eliminating the punitive 3-month time limit would allow more flexibility for those searching for work, working part-time, or struggling with other barriers to work. Studies show that the time limit is ineffective, as it substantially reduces SNAP participation among those subject to it, while also not increasing employment or earned wages.⁶
- Provide and implement a transition into SNAP for the following U.S. territories: Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands. In lieu of SNAP, these U.S. territories currently receive nutrition assistance through their NAPs, which are funded via block grants. Due to the fixed nature of the funding, participation in NAP for territories is limited by the amount of funding available, instead of being based on need. As a result, nutrition assistance in territories during an economic

³ Rosenbaum, Dottie, Stacy Dean, and Zoe Neuberger. “The Case for Boosting SNAP Benefits in Next Major Economic Response Package.” Center for Policy and Budget Priorities. Accessed July 12, 2022. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-case-for-boosting-snap-benefits-in-next-major-economic-response>

⁴ Sutton, Colleen Barton. “Addressing the Looming Hunger Cliff: Improve SNAP Deductions.” *Food Research & Action Center* (blog). Accessed July 12, 2022. <https://frac.org/blog/addressing-the-looming-hunger-cliff-improve-snap-deductions>.

⁵ Jones, Ty. “SNAP’s Homeless Shelter Deduction Can Provide Much-Needed Help for Homeless Individuals and Families.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, December 2, 2011 <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/12-2-11pov.pdf>

⁶ Urban Institute. “The Impact of SNAP Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) Time Limit Reinstatement in Nine States.” Accessed July 12, 2022. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/impact-snap-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawd-time-limit-reinstatement-nine-states>

downturn or a natural disaster is less flexible and benefit levels for households are historically below what SNAP would provide. Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands also generally have greater food insecurity and higher poverty rates than the 50 states, as well as substantially higher food costs, making it even more difficult for territories to use their existing block grants to provide benefits equivalent to SNAP.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request and we look forward to working with the Conference on crafting policy proposals to modernize our food system and address the hunger crisis.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



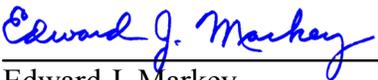
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