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The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights



April 25, 2023

Dear Member of Congress,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, NAACP, National Action Network, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, National Council of Negro Women, National Urban League, and UnidosUS write to share with you our deep concerns about emerging proposals to cut food assistance (SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) to millions of poor households in the budget and Farm Bill this year. These proposals would have a significant impact on the communities we represent. **As civil rights organizations, we want to express our strong support for SNAP and our unified opposition to proposed cuts to SNAP or changes that will take food away from people of color, children, older Americans, veterans, low-income working parents, people with disabilities, and other people whom we have forced through law and policy to live at the margins.**

Proposals to cut SNAP will widen an already serious problem in many Black and Hispanic communities: levels of food insecurity that are much higher than those of white households. In 2021, nearly 20 percent of Black households and more than 16 percent of Hispanic households experienced food insecurity, according to the USDA, compared to 7 percent of white households.

Because people of color have higher poverty rates — which is a result of deep-rooted historical discrimination in employment, housing, and education, as well as other forms of structural racism — they participate in SNAP and other federal nutrition programs at disproportionately high rates. SNAP is highly effective at improving nutrition and well-being, and it plays a critical role in mitigating racial disparities in rates of food insecurity.

Many of the SNAP proposals put forth during this Congress would create or worsen barriers and exclusions that disproportionately affect low-income people of color and could exacerbate the long-standing racial disparities in rates of food insecurity. Congress should use the budget process and Farm Bill to improve SNAP and address these racial disparities — not make them worse.

We are particularly concerned with new proposals in the House and Senate to take SNAP's already harsh work requirement and extend it to parents of children ages 7 and up and to older Americans ages 50 to 64. For example, the "America Works" proposal could cause one in four SNAP households (10 million) to lose food assistance, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

About 4 million school-age children and 2 million older Americans ages 50 to 64 live in households that could have their benefits reduced. Others likely affected include low-income veterans, some young people

aging out of foster care, and people returning from incarceration who seek employment but face significant barriers to getting hired.

Most people participating in SNAP who can work do work. The vast majority of those who don't are children, disabled adults, and older people who face work obstacles. The more than two-thirds of SNAP participants who are not expected to work are children, disabled adults, and older people.

The same is true of health care: We are deeply concerned with proposals to take health care away from households if they don't comply with work requirements. Under a plan that the last administration encouraged, 18,000 people in Arkansas lost their Medicaid-provided health care when they couldn't comply with the work reporting requirements.

No poor household in this country should have their basic food and health assistance conditioned upon their ability to work or prove they are exempt from work requirements. Past experience shows that a significant number of people would likely lose benefits because their state agency failed to screen them for an exemption they should have qualified for or because they were unable to navigate the verification system to prove they are working.

We know that SNAP works. Numerous studies document the important impact of SNAP in reducing hunger and poverty and improving health, education, and other important outcomes. A study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* (Srinivasan and Pooler, 2018) found that elderly individuals are less likely to skip their medications when they get SNAP; another study, in the *American Economic Review* (Hoyne, Schanzenbach, and Almond, 2016) showed that children who had access to SNAP enjoyed benefits, including lower levels of obesity and greater high school completion.

Finally, we would just remind you that millions of poor SNAP households have just had their SNAP benefits reduced. Households in 32 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are now getting at least \$95 a month less with the recent end of the SNAP emergency allotments enacted during COVID. An Urban Institute study last year showed the dramatic impact this temporary boost in SNAP benefits had in reducing poverty, with the highest reduction in poverty rates for Black and Hispanic people.

SNAP faces significant threats this year, and we ask that you do everything you can to protect and strengthen this vital program in both budget negotiations and Farm Bill legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please contact Peggy Ramin, policy counsel for health care and poverty, at ramin@civilrights.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
NAACP
National Action Network
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
National Council of Negro Women
National Urban League
UnidosUS