



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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September 11, 2013

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

As the House considers a proposal to address nutrition programs apart from the Farm Bill, I write to urge you to oppose harmful cuts and changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The House proposal would cut SNAP by \$40 billion and harm hungry children, poor families, vulnerable seniors and workers who are underemployed or unable to find employment.

Adequate and nutritious food is a fundamental human right and a basic need that is integral to protecting the life and dignity of the human person. SNAP is one of the most effective and important federal programs to combat hunger in the nation by helping to feed millions of persons in need every year.

SNAP helps relieve pressure on overwhelmed parishes, charities, food banks, pantries and other emergency food providers across the country that could not begin to meet the need for food assistance if SNAP eligibility or benefits were reduced. The faith community and the private sector are vital in the fight to combat hunger. But government has an indispensable role in safeguarding and promoting the common good of all. This includes ensuring poor and hungry people have access to adequate and nutritious food.

Struggling people are not seeking a life of government dependency but rightfully deserve decent paying jobs to provide for them and their families. Even with evidence of a modest economic recovery, the economy still has not improved the standard of living for many people, especially for the poor and the working poor. More than four million people have been jobless for over six months, and that does not include the millions more who have simply lost hope. For every available job, there are often five unemployed and underemployed people actively vying for it. SNAP remains an essential tool to help struggling individuals and families avoid hunger and stay out of poverty.

Proposals to eliminate access to SNAP for people who have at some point in their lifetime committed certain crimes are counterproductive and an affront to human dignity. Persons who have paid their debt to society and their families should not be penalized for the sins of the past. A one-size-fits-all approach to state waivers on SNAP work requirements is unreasonable. States should continue to be afforded the flexibility to assess and respond to local needs and economic conditions. Ending state waivers will only harm vulnerable people.

How the House chooses to address our nation's hunger and nutrition programs will have profound human and moral consequences. This is a crucial time for our nation to place a circle of protection around programs that build a more just framework and put poor and hungry people first. I respectfully urge you to reject efforts to reduce or restructure SNAP, and to pursue instead the common good in agriculture and food policy that works from a genuine preferential option for the poor.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development