

May 15, 2018

The Honorable Steve Pearce
2432 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-3102
robert.macgregor@mail.house.gov

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham
214 Cannon House Office Building
Washington D.C., 20515-3101
arielle.plavcan@mail.house.gov

The Honorable Ben Ray Lujan
2432 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-3102
elya.trachman@mail.house.gov

VIA EMAIL

Re: 2018 Farm Bill Must Protect and Strengthen SNAP and Other Food Assistance Programs

Dear Members of Congress,

We write to urge the New Mexico congressional delegation to fully fund and protect the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the 2018 Farm Bill. 1 in 4 New Mexicans¹, and almost 99,000 children rely on SNAP to eat.² SNAP reduces hunger and poverty, improves health and learning, increases productivity, creates jobs, and invests in the future of our communities.

The undersigned are state and local organizations committed to ensuring a strong and effective nutrition safety net for New Mexico families. We call on our members of Congress to oppose the current Farm Bill because it will reduce access to SNAP for hundreds of thousands of New Mexicans and make it harder for families with unemployed or underemployed adults to eat or find work.

SNAP is New Mexico's Most Effective Anti-Hunger Tool

Throughout our state, far too many families are struggling to make ends meet. In New Mexico, 332,610 people are food insecure, accounting for 16 percent of the state's population.³ Of these

¹ Food and Nutrition Services, Characteristics of a SNAP Household, FY 2016, available at <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2016.pdf>

² *Id.*

³ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap 2017, available at http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-meal-gap/2015/MMG_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2015_2/NM_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2015.pdf

individuals at risk for hunger, 125,000 are children, which is 26 percent of the children in the state.⁴ SNAP, as our state's most effective anti-hunger tool, has the broadest reach to address these individuals quickly and effectively. It helped 471,000 New Mexicans put food on the table last year alone.⁵ Nearly two-thirds of those who use the program are children, the elderly, or people with disabilities.⁶ In 2016, 41 percent of households participating in SNAP in New Mexico were living in deep poverty, with incomes below 50 percent of the federal poverty guideline.⁷ SNAP makes sure basic needs are met by keeping 76,000 people out of poverty in New Mexico, including 36,000 children, per year, between 2009 and 2012.⁸

SNAP is an Important Work Support for New Mexico Families

For hundreds of thousands of New Mexicans, work does not itself guarantee steady or sufficient income to provide for their families. SNAP helps 1 in 7 workers in New Mexico by providing food when wages aren't simply enough.⁹ Workers turn to SNAP to supplement low and fluctuating pay and to help families get by during spells of unemployment. Some of the most common occupations in the state have low wages, unpredictable scheduling, and few benefits. For example, the most common occupations among New Mexicans participating in SNAP have hourly wages far below the state average of \$21.23 in 2016. Over two-fifths of personal care aides, over one-third of cooks and childcare workers, and one-third of housekeeping cleaners participate in SNAP in New Mexico.¹⁰ SNAP is a crucial support for workers because they can apply when their income drops and receive benefits rapidly and on a monthly basis. SNAP benefits also provide help when hours drop and limited scheduling makes working more hours difficult.

SNAP Creates Jobs and Brings Millions of Dollars into our Local Economy

SNAP benefits are spent at more than 1,590 authorized retailers in New Mexico, including grocers and local food retailers around the state.¹¹ \$650.5 million of SNAP benefits were redeemed in New Mexico in 2017 alone.¹² Every dollar of federal SNAP benefits generates \$1.70 in economic

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Food and Nutrition Services, Characteristics of a SNAP Household, FY 2016, available at <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2016.pdf>

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Food and Nutrition Services, Characteristics of a SNAP Household, FY 2009-2012.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Analysis of 2013-2015 American Community Survey Data. Average wage data from Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2016 Occupational Employment Statistical survey.

¹¹ See Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP Retailer Database, available at https://www.cbpp.org/snap-retailers-database/#New_Mexico

¹² See Food and Nutrition Services, 2017 SNAP Retailer Management Year End Summary, available at <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/2017-SNAP-Retailer-Management-Year-End-Summary.pdf>

activity.¹³ A 2010 study by the USDA found that for every \$1 billion of added SNAP funding, between 8,900 and 17,000 jobs were created.¹⁴

Cuts to Food Assistance in the Farm Bill Will Hurt New Mexico Families

The Farm Bill that would make it harder for over a hundred thousand New Mexicans to put food on the table by cutting SNAP benefits by \$20 billion dollars over the next ten years and shifting this money into an untested work program with unforgiving penalties that could reduce benefits for families up to three years. As you know, unemployment rates in New Mexico are the second highest in the country, in some counties even doubling and tripling the national average.¹⁵ The bill would take away food assistance from unemployed or underemployed SNAP participants between ages 18 through 59 who are not disabled, including parents of children over six years old. This will directly impact over 120,000 New Mexicans, who will face the loss of SNAP and hundreds of thousands of other participants who live in the same households as unemployed workers.

The 2018 Farm Bill would also restrict a state option known as “categorical eligibility”, which allows states to adjust income cutoffs for those making a little more than the federal eligibility cutoff amount of 130 percent so families are not suddenly cut off of SNAP because of a small increase in income. This change would affect 31 states, including New Mexico, and essentially impose a benefit cliff that any family needing food assistance could face if they are able to make a little more than 130 percent of the federal poverty guideline while receiving SNAP benefits.

Changes to federal food assistance programs will also impact Native American communities in New Mexico, which include 23 sovereign nations. As of February 2018, 75,637 SNAP participants in New Mexico were Native American.¹⁶ The federal government must engage in government to government consultation prior to changing federal food programs that impact Native Americans.¹⁷ These governments have not been consulted about the proposed changes in the Farm Bill. The proposed Farm Bill would also eliminate federal requirements that food distribution participants on Native American reservations be surveyed to determine which traditional foods should be included in distributions. Native American nations have the right to govern their affairs and protect the health and well-being of their peoples.

¹³ USDA Economic Research Service, 2010 The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP, available at

https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/44748/7996_err103_1_.pdf?v=41056

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Local Area Unemployment Statistics, New Mexico, February 2017, Bureau of Labor Statistics. See

<https://data.bls.gov/map/MapToolServlet?state=35&datatype=unemployment&year=2017&period=M02&survey=la&map=county&seasonal=u>

¹⁶ Human Services Department Monthly Statistical Report, March 2018, available at

http://www.hsd.state.nm.us/uploads/FileLinks/587930e6bdd0402c9d4990a78c041734/Mar2018_MSR.pdf.

¹⁷ USDA Department Regulation 1350-001, Tribal Consultation, available at

<https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departmental-regulation-1350-001>

We call on you to protect and defend the federal nutrition programs from structural changes and to fully fund and defend SNAP from budget cuts, taking steps to ensure all people in New Mexico have access to the nutrition they need to live healthy and productive lives. We call on you to protect one of the most effective forms of economic stimulus the state can offer many local businesses that are authorized to accept SNAP benefits. The proposed cuts and changes to SNAP will take away food from children, working people, people struggling to find jobs, and many others struggling just to make ends meet.

We stand ready to work with our members of Congress to protect this important program.

Sincerely,

New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty
El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos
Equality New Mexico
Interfaith Worker Justice - New Mexico
National Education Association-NEW MEXICO
Ojo Sarco Community Center
Rio Grande Food Project
RISE Stronger New Mexico
La Semilla Food Center
Santa Maria de la Vid Abbey
Food Bank of Eastern New Mexico
Interfaith Hunger Coalition
The Community Pantry
New Mexico Pediatric Society
Prosperity Works
National Center for Frontier Communities
New Mexico Asian Family Center
Senior Citizens Law Office
Freeman House
Prosperity Works
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-New Mexico
New Mexico Voices for Children
National Union of Hospital and Healthcare Employees- District 1199NM
New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness
Mesilla Valley Community of Hope
Casa Milagro
Enlace Comunitario
Southwest Women's Law Center
New Mexico Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Crossroads for Women
Roadrunner Food Bank of New Mexico
New Mexico Children Advocacy Networks
Encuentro
OLÉ Education Fund
Pegasus Legal Services for Children
Strong Families NM of Forward Together
Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico
National Center for Frontier Communities
Southwest Center for Health Innovation
Center for Civic Policy
NM CAFé (Comunidades en Acción y de Fe)
New Mexico Community Health Worker Association