

May 17, 2020

Members of the Committee are tired of hearing this, I know, but the people I represent must be included in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP.

The Marianas is not currently part of SNAP, but instead receives a block grant, which has been shown over and over to be an inadequate response to combatting food insecurity.

Just last October, families I am responsible for were cut from the block grant program because there was not enough fiscal 2021 money available to feed everyone in need. Families that were not cut completely from the program had their benefits cut 25 percent.

I hope we can all agree it is unacceptable to be cutting food aid in the middle of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

I was able to get supplemental funding for fiscal 2021 in December's appropriation and additional funding in the American Rescue Plan.

And I urged local authorities to trust I would be able to get that extra money and not to cut benefits.

But I was ignored, and families went hungry.

This story is not new. Throughout my tenure in Congress, I have had repeatedly to ask for funding to supplement the block grant — a series of stop-gap solutions.

But this hit-and-miss approach to funding is no way for the federal government to run a program that people's very lives depend on.

And there is a simple solution. Treat the people I represent in the Mariana Islands the same way their fellow U.S. citizens are treated in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands: Include my people in SNAP.

SNAP is set up to respond to changing economic conditions, natural disasters, pandemics, and changes in food prices.

SNAP provides a basic level of food assistance to those in need. And by doing so SNAP benefits all of us.

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Because when children have adequate access to food, they do better in school and eventually become productive members of society.

When adults are adequately fed, they can work and pull their families out of poverty and out of reliance on federal programs like SNAP.

I have introduced legislation to add the Marianas to SNAP: H.R. 421, the AYUDA Act, which currently has 29 cosponsors.

I have had encouraging discussions with Secretary Vilsack and Deputy Undersecretary Dean about their existing statutory authority to extend SNAP to the Marianas with any transitional adjustments they deem necessary.

And I have raised this issue time and again with this committee and with our staff.

I am not going to give up – or go away.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor the AYUDA Act, and I look forward to more discussions with USDA and FNS to make SNAP in the Marianas a reality.

Thank you.



Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress