

## Written Statement

Rep. James P. McGovern (MA-02)  
**Testimony before the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee**April 9, 2024

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Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, and Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to share my priorities for the fiscal year 2025 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies appropriations bill. I would like to use this opportunity to discuss food security at home and abroad, and the importance of coming together to end hunger once and for all.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. The program improves food security, reduces poverty,<sup>1</sup> and is linked to improved health outcomes and lower health care costs.<sup>2</sup> I am proud to serve as a senior member of the House Agriculture Committee, which has jurisdiction over the program. As part of my work at the Agriculture Committee, I have spent years talking to people with lived experiences of hunger, advocates, and experts about the need to protect SNAP from cuts or more onerous restrictions. As such, I am requesting the Committee include "such sums" language to ensure hungry people continue to have access to these critical benefits. I know the Subcommittee Chair and I differ in our opinion on restrictions in SNAP, but I implore this Committee to reject any rider to further limit what recipients can buy or otherwise pilot food restrictions. It's a dignity issue. This Committee doesn't try to police the shopping carts of Members of Congress – or anyone not utilizing federal nutrition benefits, for that matter – and it is wrong for Congress to dictate to poor

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<sup>1</sup> National Institutes of Health <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6836787/>

<sup>2</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs>

people how they should eat. Incentive programs like the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program and SNAP Education have proven to be useful tools in helping families eat healthier on a tight budget. I'd welcome Members of this Committee to join with me in working to further expand these critical programs that promote better access to fruits and vegetables and provide opportunities for people to cook more healthfully in a culturally appropriate manner.

I also ask the Committee to provide robust funding for other safety net programs that address hunger in America. After months of needless delays, I am pleased that the final FY24 Agriculture Appropriations bill fully funded the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to ensure pregnant and postpartum moms and their young children continue to have access to these critical benefits without fear of losing them or being placed on waitlists. There is a decades-long history of both sides coming together to fully-fund WIC to meet expected participation, and it is imperative we fully fund the President's FY25 request of \$7.7 billion for WIC.

Additionally, I urge the Committee to provide \$115 million for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) storage and distribution and rural infrastructure grants, \$4.4 billion for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and \$425 million for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).

Further, I urge you to support our school meal and summer feeding programs, including strong support for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Farm to School grants, and School Kitchen Equipment grants. This year, I am also leading an effort to address the workforce crisis within school nutrition programs. A recent School Nutrition Association survey of program directors found that 90% of school meal programs are grappling with staffing shortages.<sup>3</sup> Toward

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<sup>3</sup> School Nutrition Association <https://schoolnutrition.org/resource/2024-position-paper-increase-school-meal-reimbursements/>

that end, I will be requesting a school food vacancy report and wage study, as well as funds for school food workforce and “Chefs in the Schools” pilot programs to support chef training programs and menu development.

Additionally, I urge the Committee to address the terrible problem of food waste. Nearly 40% of food grown and produced in the United States goes to waste,<sup>4</sup> increasing greenhouse gas emissions<sup>5</sup> and waste management costs and challenges for municipalities.<sup>6</sup> To support food recovery efforts, I ask the Committee to fully fund the Food Loss and Waste Reduction Liaison at USDA, as authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill, and to include report language to further food waste education and prevention efforts at schools.

Turning to America’s critical leadership on global food security, I applaud the Committee’s long-standing bipartisan support for Food for Peace, Food for Progress, and the George McGovern-Robert Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. I am especially grateful for the Committee’s bipartisan support of the McGovern-Dole Program. As you know, increased funding for this program remains a top priority for me, and I am frustrated that over the span of 21 years Congress has yet to fund the program at the \$300 million level provided to the pilot program that existed prior to McGovern-Dole being established as a permanent program in law. This year, Congressman Mann and I are again co-leading a bipartisan letter urging the Committee to provide \$265 million in FY 2025 for the McGovern-Dole Program. I hope the Committee will include this level of funding in the FY 2025 appropriations bill.

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<sup>4</sup> Feeding America <https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/reduce-food-waste#:~:text=Shockingly%2C%20nearly%2040%25%20of%20all,billion%20pounds%20of%20food%20waste.>

<sup>5</sup> Environmental Protection Agency <https://www.epa.gov/land-research/farm-kitchen-environmental-impacts-us-food-waste>

<sup>6</sup> Natural Resources Defense Council <https://www.nrdc.org/food-matters#cities>

The world is facing a global food crisis brought on by severe weather events due to changing climate patterns, local and regional conflict, the impact on key commodities due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the economic stress caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and natural disasters. Rarely in our lifetimes have programs like the McGovern-Dole Program, Food for Progress, and Title II P.L. 480 Food for Peace been more needed. I strongly support providing \$2 billion for Food for Peace for FY 2025, and I believe Congress will need to provide even more given the mounting global food crisis and rising costs of energy, fuel, warehousing, and transportation. I also ask that the Committee make special note of the needs of infants and children, especially those suffering from severe malnutrition and undernutrition, when allocating funds and commodities for Food for Peace. Proven treatments for severe malnutrition, such as Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) and targeted nutritional supplements, should be fully incorporated into FFP programs where appropriate.

Lastly, I ask the Committee to support conservation programs at USDA, which enjoy significant, broad support across the country – so much so that programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program remain vastly oversubscribed. These voluntary programs help farmers in every state and territory to increase the value of their operations through land stewardship, all while increasing the resilience of our food system overall. Conservation programs are especially important for farmers in regions that USDA considers “underserved” by its programs, including the Northeast. In my home state of Massachusetts, where farms have remained small- and medium-sized despite the national trend of farm consolidation, USDA’s conservation programs are often the only access that producers have to the federal farm safety net. I ask the Committee to embrace our farmers’ enthusiastic adoption of voluntary conservation measures, and I therefore urge the Committee to reject any harmful riders or provisions that may jeopardize our farmers’ ability to

strengthen their own operations and our food system, including by protecting the crucial conservation investments made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.