

**A THREAT TO AMERICA'S CHILDREN:
THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSED
CHANGES TO BROAD-BASED CATEGORICAL
ELIGIBILITY FOR THE SUPPLEMENTAL
NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND CONSUMER
POLICY

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND REFORM**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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- * Letter from the U.S. Conference of Mayors; Rep. Krishnomoorthi.
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- * Letter from the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce; Rep. Krishnomoorthi.
- * Letter from a group of chefs who feed hungry kids through the No Kid Hungry Campaign; Rep. Krishnomoorthi.
- * Copy of Maine’s long-form application for food stamps; Rep. Pressley.
- * News article, Detroit News, “Detroit plays games with school funding,” Sept. 28, 2017; submitted by Rep. Tlaib.

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Thursday, February 6, 2020

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND CONSUMER POLICY,
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:09 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Raja Krishnamoorthi (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Krishnamoorthi, Maloney, Khanna, Pressley, Tlaib, Connolly, Porter, Cloud, Grothman, Comer, and Miller.

Also present: Representative Sarbanes.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. The committee will come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

I now recognize myself for five minutes to give an opening statement.

Every child deserves the chance to grow up healthy. Children shouldn't have to worry about where their next meal will come from. That's an unimaginable burden for a young person that can deprive them of their childhood. Food insecurity hurts children's academic outcomes, their ability to pay attention, and their behavior. It has long-term impacts on physical and mental health and even depresses lifetime earnings.

As Dr. Martin Luther King said in 1964, there is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources now to get rid of it. That same year, in 1964, America enacted the precursor to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP. America still has the resources to address poverty and the ability to lift up society's most vulnerable so they can achieve the American dream.

SNAP is one of our best tools for doing that. It provides moderate assistance to help feed Americans in need. On average, only \$1.43 per meal for participants and nearly 70 percent of households receiving SNAP benefits have children.

But SNAP doesn't just help feed children, the elderly, and the disabled that make up two thirds of its participants. It also boosts the economy, more than any other government program. According

to Moody's, every dollar of SNAP benefits increases GDP by \$1.73. Just to repeat, every \$1 of SNAP benefits increases the national economy by \$1.37. That's an incredible return on investment.

And SNAP creates jobs. According to the USDA, every \$10,000 in SNAP benefits creates one full-time rural job and approximately every \$25,000 in SNAP benefits creates one full-time urban job. SNAP dollars are quickly spent on food necessities and flow into local businesses, ultimately supporting trucking and farm jobs, among other things. So this program designed to feed children, the elderly, and the disabled also boosts our economy and creates jobs.

As this committee is responsible for combating waste, fraud, and abuse, it's also worth noting that SNAP-related fraud is almost nonexistent. SNAP also gives states flexibility to tailor the program to their citizens' needs.

First, it incentivizes work by allowing states to ease income eligibility limits so that someone doesn't have to turn down work to maintain SNAP eligibility as they get back on their feet.

Second, SNAP allows states to let citizens own a car to get to work or to save for an emergency like surprise medical bills.

The administration currently through their proposal to change SNAP wants to disarm states of both of these tools, but in doing so it will strip 3.1 million households of their SNAP benefits, including more than 2 million households with children. It also strips free lunch enrollment for nearly 1 million kids.

For those children, the Trump administration policy would take food out of their mouths at home and at school. How can we expect those kids to succeed? The administration needs to abandon this proposal.

As the late chairman, Elijah Cummings, would have said, we are better than this. We know what a difference SNAP makes for families and children who would otherwise go hungry.

I know from personal experience. I came to the United States from India with my parents when I was three months old so my father could pursue his education and our family could embrace the opportunities that America has to offer. Despite my parents' best efforts, it wasn't easy. When we needed help, we were able to receive food stamps as my parents worked their way out of a difficult time.

Today, my father is an engineering professor of 40 years, still teaching at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, my brother is a doctor, and I'm a Congressman. That was my family's dream, and it was possible because of my parents' hard work, but also because of the opportunities our country presents and the generosity and good will of the people of America.

An American President once told Congress, quote, "that hunger and malnutrition persists in a land such as ours is embarrassing and intolerable." That President was Richard Nixon. If President Nixon and Dr. King could agree on the importance of fighting hunger all those decades ago, surely, surely, we can find common ground today to continue Congress' strong support for SNAP.

I thank you.

And now I recognize Chairwoman Maloney for her opening statement.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thanks. I thank you so much.

I thank all of you for coming today.

As the chairwoman on the Committee on Oversight and Reform, I want to thank Raja Krishnamoorthi, the chairman of the Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy, for convening this important hearing. I also want to thank him for sharing his personal story and showing how important the program is and how we need to protect food for our families, many struggling, that are wonderful people.

I think you really showed the importance of this incredible program.

This hearing will examine the proposed rollbacks of broad-based categorical eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, one of the most important programs the Federal Government has. This is the third in a series of four hearings that we're having this week, examining the negative effects of the Trump administration's policies on poverty, housing, hunger, and health regulations for children.

These hearings are about the Trump administration's attack on children. Congress should be protecting children from the administration's harmful regulations and ensuring that our children have the resources they need to reach their full potential.

One in six children in this country is already food insecure, meaning they lack reliable access to food. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's own estimate, if this proposal is enacted, over 680,000 households with children would lose the SNAP food benefits and nearly 1 million children would likely lose direct enrollment for free school meals.

The administration's effort to roll back broad-based eligibility for SNAP will increase food insecurity for children across this country. Any effort to modify SNAP should reduce food insecurity and not make kids hungry, especially here in America.

I yield back.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. I thank you, Chairwoman. I thank you for your leadership on this particular issue. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

Mrs. MALONEY. Well, I thank you for your leadership. All of these hearings, I think, are so important, and it shows a uniformity of attack on children. We're looking at food, rolling back the poverty standards, loosening the controls on toxic emissions into the environment, all terribly damaging to children. I think we should put in bills to put them all back and make it law in the country.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Well, I thank you, Chairwoman.

Mrs. MALONEY. I thank you.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Mr. Cloud is on his way back from an engagement, and he will present his opening statement following the witnesses.

Let me first introduce Ms. Lisa Davis, senior vice president for the No Kid Hungry Campaign and Share Our Strength.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Zach Pethan, Principal of Jefferson Elementary School in the Sheboygan Area School District in Wisconsin.

Thank you so much.

Ms. Diane Sullivan, an advocate, and she's with the organization Witnesses to Hunger.

Ms. Tega Toney. She's a teacher at Oak Hill High School in the Fayette County schools.

Thank you.

And, of course, Mr. Adolphsen, thank you so much for coming.

He is a policy director with the Foundation for Government Accountability.

Thank you, sir.

If you would all please rise and raise your right hand, I will begin by swearing you in.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Thank you, and you may be seated.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. The microphones are sensitive, so please speak directly into them. I'll just explain the lighting system very briefly. Green means go. Red means stop. And yellow, unlike with stop lights here, means speed up.

OK. So with that, Ms. Davis, you are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF LISA DAVIS, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, NO KID HUNGRY CAMPAIGN, SHARE OUR STRENGTH

Ms. DAVIS. Thank you. Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to share concerns about the administration's proposed rule to roll back broad-based categorical eligibility, or BBCE.

My name is Lisa Davis, and I'm the senior vice president of Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Campaign. Share Our Strength is focused on ending poverty and hunger in the U.S. and worldwide, but we do have a particular focus on children here in the United States.

I'm here today to talk about two things. First, to provide a brief overview of BBCE and why it is so important for families; and, second, how this rule would hurt working poor families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.

First, what it does. BBCE is an effective practical policy. There are many families with gross incomes slightly above 130 percent of poverty but who still have difficulty making ends meet and affording food because of high costs of things like housing, childcare, medical benefits. BBCE allows these families to remain eligible for SNAP and preschool meals. It creates efficiency and reduces administrative burdens on state agencies and schools.

But, most importantly, it encourages work. It helps low-income families move out of poverty and build financial security. It allows them to accumulate modest assets to weather an unexpected financial crisis. It also helps ensure that their children can receive the nutrition they need at home and at school.

One thing BBCE is not is an automatic pathway to SNAP benefits. Families must still apply and qualify for benefits through the regular application process, which has rigorous procedures for documenting income and circumstances. Indeed, families can be cat-

egorically eligible for SNAP but not receive a benefit because their net income is too high.

Let me give you an example of who it helps. A single mother with two children who works full time and earns \$12.50 an hour could receive \$161 in SNAP per month. Without BBCE, if her wages increased by just 50 cents an hour, her income would exceed 130 percent of poverty and her family would lose SNAP, ending up with \$75 per month fewer in resources. She would actually be worse off for accepting a marginal raise. BBCE prevents that and supports work by letting that family slowly phase off SNAP as mom's earnings increase

Access to SNAP is important because a robust body of research reinforces that SNAP is our Nation's most effective program, particularly for children. By reducing food insecurity and poverty and improving a child's long-term outcomes, including health, education, and even lifetime earnings, SNAP provides a return of investment that any corporate CEO would envy.

And make no mistake, the administration's proposal to restrict BBCE would be a harsh step backward in our fight to end childhood hunger. If the administration's proposed rule becomes law, 3.1 million people, more than 2 million of whom are in families with children, will lose their SNAP benefits entirely, and an estimated 982,000 children will lose the automatic certification for free school meals that results from their family's receipt of SNAP.

Even though many of these children will remain income-eligible for free or reduced-price meals, experience tells us that far too many will fall through the cracks. Confusion about eligibility, complex paperwork, human error, and stigma all create barriers to enrollment. Even the lower cost of a reduced-price meal is a heavy burden for families that are saving every dime to cover basics like rent, utilities, and gas.

So, what happens when children lose SNAP and school meals? They face a double whammy of meals lost at home and at school. It exacerbates all the other problems that hungry children face, diminishing their academic performance, their mental and physical health, and their opportunity to achieve their full potential. Food is one of the most important school supplies children have.

I work with families living with food insecurity. They are moms and dads who are working incredibly hard to better their lives and those of their children. Often they hold down multiple jobs, cut expenses to the bone, and yet still find it impossible to stretch their paychecks to make ends meet. One emergency expense, like a car repair or a medical bill, can set them back for months or even years.

I would like to leave you with one final thought. Broad-based categorical eligibility is working. It helps low-income families work and build savings. It also ensures that their children get the fuel they need to grow, thrive, and reach their full potential. Those are goals we can all agree on.

Thank you.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Ms. Davis.

Mr. Pethan.

**STATEMENT OF ZACH PETHAN, PRINCIPAL, JEFFERSON
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, SHEBOYGAN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Mr. PETHAN. It is 10 a.m. on Monday morning, and you are sitting in your third grade classroom. The teacher is beginning to introduce the reading lesson for the day, which is focused on the phonics of how consonant blends work together to make sounds that will help you decode words when you are reading.

You are asked to work together with a partner to identify words with the same pattern. You look around and think that everyone is able to focus on the task, but you simply cannot. It has been approximately 65 hours since you ate a substantial, quality meal last week, Friday, for lunch at school.

Your stomach begins to turn, and you start to feel anxious and frustrated and unable to focus. All you can think about is the lunch period that won't begin for another two hours. The teacher notices that you are not paying attention and asks you to focus on the partner project as she reminds you how important it is to understand this to be a good reader.

You think, "This is not as important to me as it is to you. I'm hungry." You lose a connection with that teacher because you believe she doesn't understand you and, therefore, you begin to tune her out.

After several weeks, months, years of tuning the teachers out, you realize that you are so far behind your peers, the idea of catching up academically seems overwhelming and, therefore, not worth your energy. You look for ways to pass the time, which means talking to your friends and disrupting the class.

All of these disruptions get you sent to the principal's office and out of class so as to avoid the embarrassment of not knowing the material. The disruptions become more chronic and severe until eventually you are suspended from school. Time goes on, and your attendance rate drops. When desperation overcomes you, you decide to drop out of school.

With few job skills to enter the work force, you are left with limited options for employment. They do not pay well enough or are stable enough to save money or advance your career. You are living paycheck to paycheck.

You start a family and want what is best for them. You want what every parent wants from their children from every background: a better future. You start to work several jobs so you can become financially secure, but to do so you are not spending time at home with your family. Your kids want you around, your child's school wants you involved, but you have to decide between being there for your kids or financial solvency.

One of the biggest barriers to academic/social success and subsequently social mobility is nutrition. Jefferson Elementary School in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, has students like this, as well as countless schools across the country. These schools are not only located in major urban areas, but also suburban and rural communities, even in Sheboygan County that boasts one of the lowest percentages of unemployment in the country. Changes affecting eligibility of students to access school nutrition will have an overall negative effect in our schools and communities across the country.

Using the combined average percentage of students that are from Direct Certified families, the Sheboygan Area School District has four schools eligible and participating in the CEP program. The CEP program allows these schools to offer a free breakfast and lunch to all of our students, regardless of their participation in the SNAP program. Parents no longer have to complete a complex annual free or reduced lunch application, but a much simpler alternative income form which is used to determine if the family is economically disadvantaged or not.

When all students are participating in school lunch, it creates an environment free of stigma. When all students are eating the same meal, it becomes less apparent which students come from low-income families. When all students participate without negative stigma, meal participation increases dramatically. Our data shows that when more students get a meal school option, behavior incidents decline.

When all students participate in meal programs, we are able to adjust our schedule to include serving breakfast in the classroom. Breakfast in the classroom allows teachers and students a time to share a meal together, to build relationships that go beyond education. Students and teachers can talk about their lives outside of school, learn important social skills, and spot a child that is struggling and offer support. The relationships created during these mealtimes are invaluable to building a school community focused on the whole child.

By offering free meal options, we also free parents to focus energy and resources on other needs. Parents have to buy fewer groceries because they know their child will have a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school. Parents can focus on spending quality time with their kids rather than frantically preparing breakfast or lunches. Parents can use that saved money to provide other essential needs for their families, save, or invest in their own career advancement.

If changes are made to the broad-based categorical eligibility, a segment of our families will no longer qualify for SNAP. When this percentage goes down, we are unable to offer free breakfast and lunch to all schools. Without these options available to all students, families will be forced to make tough, no-win decisions for their families. The result will be an increase in hunger and, therefore, less educational opportunity and upward mobility for our country's most valuable and vulnerable population, our kids.

I thank you so much for this opportunity to present this story about Jefferson Elementary School.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

Ms. Sullivan, you're on the clock for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF DIANE SULLIVAN, ADVOCATE, WITNESSES TO HUNGER

Ms. SULLIVAN. Chairman Krishnamoorthi and members of this esteemed committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony before you.

I am Diane Sullivan, mother of six from Medford, Massachusetts. I've experienced hunger, homelessness for a year with my family,

and have been an antipoverty advocate for the past 20 years. I seek to create meaningful seats at the table for those impacted by harmful policies like the administration's proposal to limit categorical eligibility in the SNAP program that allows individual states to consider the local economic conditions when determining which of their residents qualifies.

My family is among the 3.1 million Americans who will lose SNAP benefits if this proposed rule stands. I live with four of my children, two high school students and two recent graduates. Because my two daughters work, in addition to my own income from their part-time jobs, is also considered when determining SNAP eligibility. Our combined monthly gross income is \$124 above the Federal SNAP income limit of 130 percent FPL for a family of five. But because my state applies broad and categorical eligibility and my work-related expenses are considered, our income after deductions currently qualifies us for \$187 in monthly SNAP benefits.

My state ranks third highest in rental housing costs, second in childcare, and first in terms of the cost of our food. Categorical eligibility allows states to consider these types of barriers to food faced by their residents. Massachusetts allows for households with income up to 200 percent FPL to be considered for SNAP, not eligible but considered. Counter to the administration's rhetoric, I didn't just wander into an office, receive a pamphlet, and walk out with SNAP benefits. That is not at all how this works.

Our income at 135 percent FPL only allowed us through the door to then be intensely screened to determine that our income after deductions falls below the Federal threshold, then triggering eligibility. In fact, it took three months of overcoming bureaucratic confusion for us to be found eligible. Still, we are recovering from the time when we weren't receiving the benefits for which we were eligible. It went beyond reducing the number of healthy meals and snacks for my children, particularly my two teenage boys. It meant that I was dipping into funds meant for rent and utilities and visiting food pantries to feed my family.

Adding to the trauma of these troubles, the 16-year-old vehicle I was gifted five years ago broke down and needed repair. This delicate juggling act resulted in a rather solemn 2019 holiday season. My children do not ask for much. They're well-adjusted, respectful, and caring young adults, but that doesn't minimize the pain that I as a mother, like so many others, who had a plan to celebrate them by fulfilling their modest wish list and filling their bellies with a holiday feast. Instead, I felt as empty as the space under the tree where their gifts should have been as we sat and ate the one-pot meal I had prepared for which we were all grateful. During those months, the fruit bowl on my kitchen table often sat empty. I stretched the meat and veggies intended for one meal into two.

My fear is that we will be pushed back into the same situation if this rule is implemented. Without SNAP, in addition to having less food at home, my son could lose access to free school meals. Even if they qualify for reduced costs, that's \$252 in an annual expense my already overwhelmed budget cannot absorb. Further, we would lose access to the healthy incentive program that makes purchasing fresh produce from local farmers more affordable.

Mr. Chairman, I'm an active advocate for our neighbors who struggle to afford food in this Nation of agricultural abundance. The past few years have taught me that productive farmers who do produce the safest, most diverse and affordable food options in the world are perhaps among the best friends that low-income people can have. Increasingly, corporate retailers, policymakers, and food advocates are placing burdens on farmers that drive up food prices. Low-income families are caught in the middle between one ideology that makes food more expensive and the other which erodes the safety net.

This proposal, like many burdens placed on farmers, is designed by people who can afford to not even look at food prices when they shop. Please understand from someone who has worked hard, struggled, and still raised some really good children against the odds, this SNAP proposal is a gutshot to those least equipped to take the blow or to fight back.

I thank you for taking the time to hear not just from policy experts, but also from this expert versed in the experience of hunger. I thank you.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. I thank you very much, Ms. Sullivan.

Ms. Toney, you have five minutes.

STATEMENT OF TEGA TONEY, TEACHER, OAK HILL HIGH SCHOOL, FAYETTE COUNTY SCHOOLS

Ms. TONEY. Chairman Krishnamoorthi, Ranking Member Cloud, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Tega Toney, and I'm a social studies teacher at Oak Hill High School in Oak Hill, West Virginia. We are situated in the southern portion of the state which is struggling due to declining coal revenues and a crippling opioid epidemic. The majority of my students come from households struggling to make ends meet. Many of my students are the primary caregivers of their younger siblings. I have students who are homeless, who have lost parents to an overdose, and who are working evening jobs to contribute financially to their families. For these reasons and many more, it is gut-wrenching to see a proposal to cut SNAP benefits that will only hurt these children and families even more.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share how food insecurity is a real and tangible threat to my students and their wellbeing. Every day I see the impact hunger can have on a student. Academically, students are unable to focus and become inattentive, causing them to miss important and vital information in class. The more information students miss in class, the further behind they fall.

Food insecurity also affects students and their families emotionally. When parents are struggling to put food on the table, many may feel a sense of worthlessness. Children can sense this, especially high school students like mine. As educators, we see children bring these issues into the classroom with them. They also carry the emotional burdens they experience from home, from a food-insecure home. I have witnessed this in my students in many ways, ranging from mood swings and irritability to emotional outbursts and beyond. This is a real issue that needs to be considered when funds that provide access to food and nutrition are being cut.

My real fear and concern is that if this proposal comes to fruition, many of my students, along with thousands of other students in West Virginia, will lose access to food at home and at school. While it is true that some of those students will still qualify for free and reduced price meals, it will require their parents or legal guardians to submit paperwork. This is a purposefully unnecessary barrier. There are countless instances when parents cannot complete the required paperwork. Just in my community, I can tell that you that this could be due to pride, shame, or an incapacitation as a result of addiction.

Almost a decade ago, my school district recognized the need to combat the food insecurity that was plaguing our students. We included a universal feeding program in our excess levy so that all students, no matter their socioeconomic status, receive free breakfast and lunch. This is a combined effort of the Federal Government, our school district, and taxpayers to care for our most vulnerable population: our children.

Every school in our district qualifies under the community eligibility provision. We receive Federal money to cover the initial costs, and the money from the excess levy covers the rest. The levy is up for a vote every five years and has always passed with more than a 70 percent pass rate. The message our district sends is clear: We care about kids and their need for proper nutrition.

While I tout and I am proud of our universal feeding program, it does raise an important question. Is it fair to expect a school district to shoulder a responsibility of this magnitude? If this proposal is enacted, many school districts would not be able to develop and implement creative solutions such as the one in my district. Are we going to expect teachers, school cooks, custodians, and secretaries to begin carrying this responsibility?

School employees already carry our students' emotional baggage home with us. In many instances, school employees try to meet the basic needs of our students, while also caring for our own families. We love and care for kids. That is why we are in the business we are in. But is it fair to expect us to shoulder this burden too?

In southern West Virginia, our families, students, schools, and communities are hurting. Unfortunately, our situation is not unique. The issues we face can also be found in cities, towns, and rural communities across this Nation. This proposal will do much harm and provide no help to the families that need it the most. The families' struggle will be compounded, and kids will suffer. We can and must do better.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Ms. Toney.

Mr. Adolphsen, you have five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF SAM ADOLPHSEN, POLICY DIRECTOR,
FOUNDATION FOR GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY**

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Chairman Krishnamoorthi, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning.

Millionaires should not be eligible for food stamps. Neither should someone with \$20,000 in the bank, a new four-wheeler or jet ski in the garage or the owner of private aircraft. And state government should do basic checks to make sure only the truly needy

receive food stamps. This isn't complicated or a conspiracy or even controversial. It's just common sense. Food stamps are meant for the neediest Americans.

And I witnessed firsthand how an innocent sounding policy like broad-based categorical eligibility, known as BBCE, can open the door wide to fraud and abuse. When I was the chief operating officer at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services and oversaw food stamp eligibility, we struggled to maintain integrity in the program because of BBCE. Someone on welfare in Maine actually owned an airplane, and recently, a millionaire detailed how easy it was for him to get welfare benefits legally thanks to BBCE.

Congress did its job in setting eligibility standards for the food stamp program, and Congress also had a good idea in trying to reduce administrative duplication by allowing automatic enrollment for some other welfare recipients. But what Congress meant for good, bureaucrats used as a gimmick. Rather than reduce administrative costs, the Clinton Administration exploited the policy to maximize enrollment.

Here's how it works. Anyone who receives a brochure printed with money from another welfare program is automatically enrolled, with the ridiculous justification that it's the same as receiving a real welfare benefit. And that loophole is so bad today that the welfare office often deems applicants eligible based on the possibility of receiving the so-called benefit. They don't even receive that. Then, no one looks at a bank account. There are no asset checks of any kind, and the income limit is instantly expanded by nearly double in most states, all with the wave of the magic welfare wand. It's the epitome of welfare fraud and, unfortunately, it has the Federal stamp of approval in more than 40 states.

The result is that millions of people with significant assets who are ineligible according to law are on food stamps, and many of these recipients have incomes up to double the Federal poverty level. That means they could be eligible for food stamps with nearly the same income level as the average American household.

For the truly needy who depend on the food stamp program, that just simply is not fair. And it's not fair to Congress who wrote the law and made it clear that it does not want food stamps for all but, rather, food stamps for those who truly need them.

The administrative state should never have been allowed to expand welfare beyond what Congress sanctioned, and the rule put forward by the Trump administration will correct that overreach.

Because this is such a practical change, those opposed to closing this loophole have decided to pivot to talking points about a program that is only loosely connected to food stamps: the school lunch program. The truth is the real impact of this rule on school lunches is virtually zero. In fact, in 34 States, not one single child will lose their school lunch eligibility as a result of this rule. And in the other States, a child eligible for free or reduced school lunch based on their income level as set in Federal law will remain eligible for free and reduced school lunch.

Very few, just 9,600 out of 30 million kids who receive free or reduced school lunch, may need to pay their portion for the school lunch because they used to be eligible only through this loophole. There may be actually zero impact because kids in continuing eligi-

bility provision schools will continue to get free lunches, regardless of their income or welfare enrollment, with no eligibility process at all. Those schools give universal free lunch today.

The Trump administration should be applauded for this simple commonsense rule. Especially now in this booming economy, it makes sense to close loopholes and government gimmicks and transition adults and their families from welfare to work, from government dependency to self-sufficiency, and the American dream.

Thank you.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Mr. Adolphsen.

I think the example, if that's true, that someone owned an airplane and got food stamps, proves that SNAP's fraud detection works. So I'm glad you brought up that example.

There are so many groups out there that want to see hungry kids fed so that they can succeed, and they rose up in strong support of this hearing. I'm going to seek unanimous consent to enter letters into the record from seven of those groups. We're proud to have received these following letters of support: One from President Randi Weingarten of the American Federation of Teachers; a letter from the U.S. Conference of Mayors, signed by 70 U.S. mayors from both red and blue states, including mayors in Texas, West Virginia, Ohio, and North Carolina; a letter from 24 faith groups; a letter from MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger; a letter from the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; a letter from the National Women's Law Center; a letter from the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce; and a letter from a group of chefs who feed hungry kids through the No Kid Hungry Campaign.

Without objection, so entered.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. I now recognize Ranking Member Cloud for his opening statement.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you witnesses. Let me first apologize for my tardiness. I was across town at the National Prayer Breakfast, and with the President leaving, we were locked in and so they could clear the roads. So I apologize again. I do thank you for being here this morning to talk about this important topic.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP, provides nutritional assistance to low-income Americans who cannot afford nutritional food for themselves and their families. SNAP has always been designed to be a temporary safety net to those who find themselves in a situation that leaves them food insecure.

When speaking of welfare reform, then-President Bill Clinton said, we need to transform a broken system that traps too many people in a cycle of dependence to one that emphasizes work and independence, to give people on welfare a chance to draw a paycheck, not a welfare check, to give those on welfare what we want for all families in America: The opportunity to succeed at home and at work.

Last July, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the agency that administers SNAP, issued a proposed rule regarding SNAP categorical eligibility. Unfortunately, some bad actors in some states, out of convenience, have taken advantage of loopholes to circumvent the requirements for eligibility beyond what was origi-

nally intended. This practice has allowed states to issue SNAP benefits to individuals whose income may exceed eligibility requirements.

And as the administration continues to examine ways to reform government programs, I do think it's important for us to keep in mind the country's current economic climate. Since President Trump took office, the U.S. economy has created over 6 million jobs. The unemployment rate has dropped 3.5 percent, the lowest it has been in this country in 50 years. In 2018, the level of food insecurity in America dropped to 11.1 percent, the lowest level since 2007.

It could seem, judging by the title of today's hearing, that some may argue that we should blame the President for the number of school children no longer receiving free school lunches. The truth is none of the administration's policy proposals regarding SNAP have yet to go into effect. When they do, however, 96 percent of children affected by the proposed rule will remain on qual—would remain qualified for either reduced priced or free meals under the National School Lunch Program.

Importantly, all eligible children will continue to receive reduced priced or free meals under the National School Lunch Program. So, yes, one could say that the President is responsible for the reduction, but not because of some draconian, heartless policy that's gone into effect but, rather, because the Trump economy is providing opportunity and upward mobility across the demographic spectrum, freeing many from reliance on the government.

Of course, there's still work to be done and there always will be, but I hope we can have a productive conversation today in good faith on how to ensure that the funds allocated for these purposes are going to those truly in need. These conversations, of course, are never easy. But if we can't have these conversations now when so many are taking steps toward financial independence, when can we?

Studies have shown that states are providing SNAP benefits to 3 to 4 million individuals who do not meet basic eligibility requirements. And let's remember that at least 96 percent of those receiving school lunches would still be eligible should this rule go into effect, with some studies showing even more.

I do think it's important today that we keep in mind what real compassion is, because there's a great tendency among politicians here in Washington, DC, to first convince themselves and then try to convince the American people that our virtue as public servants is measured by how much of their money we spend. And we can often err in choosing to define success by metrics that simply measure activity as opposed to efficacy, or we can have real compassion that cares enough to do the hard work and due diligence necessary to ensure that our best intentions as Congress are actually producing the desired outcomes.

And as we look to address the needs of our Nation, we have a responsibility to be good stewards of the people's money. That does mean from time to time that it's not only right but also our duty to evaluate how programs are working and to make adjustments to ensure that the investment our Nation is making is, one, having the desired outcome and, two, being managed efficiently.

Compassion takes in account both those in need as those working to fulfill the need, and even more so those that will come after us. As our Constitution states, our purpose is to secure the blessings of liberty, not only for ourselves, but also for our posterity.

Thank you, Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Mr. Cloud.

I now recognize myself for five minutes of questioning.

Ms. DAVIS, it's our understanding that fraud is almost non-existent in SNAP. Can you explain that and tell us why SNAP is so effective at preventing fraud, and would you mind addressing Mr. Adolphsen's comments in that regard?

Ms. DAVIS. Thank you. I'd be happy to. SNAP has one of the most effective antifraud records of any government program. Less than one percent of benefits are paid improperly, and there are criminal penalties for people who violate the law and engage in criminal conduct, as there should be. The vast majority of payments are paid to families that need them.

I think, you know, it's—one comment I'd like to make is that this rule doesn't close a loophole. It slams a doorway out of poverty shut for working families. I think we all share the belief that a good job is the best way out of poverty and that public assistance policies should foster and encourage work. That's why this rule is so baffling, because broad-based categorical eligibility does that as well as any other policy I know of. Only .2 percent of SNAP benefits go to families with net incomes over a hundred percent of poverty, and it is a small percentage of the SNAP caseload that is affected by this.

In its own regulatory analysis, USDA noted that those that would be most affected are working families with children who have very high costs of housing and childcare. They also even noted that the result would likely be an increase in food insecurity and hardship, which is unacceptable.

Then finally, if I may, for just one more point, on the school meal point, I'd like to clear up the facts.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Yes.

Ms. DAVIS. I take exception to the idea that virtually no children will be harmed. Forty thousand kids will lose free and reduced priced meals entirely, and for each one of those kids that is a very big deal. More than half of those kids will move from free meals to reduced price meals.

As Ms. Sullivan mentioned and our educators, and as we hear every day, that might not seem a lot to all of us who are quite comfortable, but to a family that is making tradeoffs between paying for utilities or buying gas to get to work, that is a very significant sum of money and can have a really profound impact.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Well, Ms. Sullivan, let me allow you to address this issue of fraud. I think that this comes up repeatedly. Can you comment on this and, you know, Mr. Adolphsen's comments in that regard too?

Ms. SULLIVAN. Absolutely.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. You have to press your button.

Ms. SULLIVAN. Yes. Thank you.

You know, this gentleman doesn't know me, but he assumes that he does, and I believe he used the terms "Here's how it works." I can tell you from my perspective as a SNAP recipient how it works.

But I think the biggest issue and the reason why there is so much talk and rhetoric, there are assumptions about who we are as people, is that we're not here in these rooms at these tables. So, I would be happy to have a conversation, a followup conversation, to really inform him of the realities.

And I understand that you've worked in a state administration.

I think here's the thing. Nobody is going to deny that fraud or waste or abuse doesn't exist. It is next to minimal. But why are we focusing so much attention on that, especially when it is such a small portion? What we need to be focused on is families like mine who will be impacted. I am not a fraud. I work. I do everything that I can to provide the best, just like everybody in this room does. I want the best for my children and feeding them healthy food is the foundation for them to build. That's what we need to be focused on, the fact that this takes food from them.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. I think there's a misconception that you want to be on SNAP aid. What's your response to that?

Ms. SULLIVAN. My response is I absolutely do not. We have—there's so much shame associated with that. You know, again—

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Tell us about that. Why is there shame associated with using SNAP?

Ms. SULLIVAN. Because people will assume that because we are accessing programs, that we are frauds, because there are people that are out there spreading that type of misinformation. We become political footballs in this game. Our children, the most vulnerable, the least able to stand up and defend themselves, are essentially being told to do your part, you know, pay your way.

Listen, I work. I happen to live in a state that is one of the most expensive in the country. Our energy costs are among the highest. It is—we struggle, and we are hardly the only ones. 3.1 million people about to lose benefits, and we know that there's more. We the people that are being impacted need to be in these spaces where these policies are being discussed so that we can take back the narrative about ourselves. We know who we are as people. We know our value in our communities and to our families, and it's time that we control that conversation and stop allowing people like this gentleman over here to my left to control that narrative about us.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Mr. Cloud, you're recognized for five minutes of questions. Oh, I'm sorry.

Ms. Miller, you are recognized for five minutes of questioning.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you, Chairman Krishnamoorthi and Ranking Member Cloud, for holding this very important hearing today. And I want to thank Ms. Toney for being here. She's from West Virginia, and it's nice to have another fellow West Virginian in the room that recognizes the importance of keeping our children and our families fed.

This topic is extremely personal and critical to my district, and I want to recognize the fact that everyone who is here today is committed to making sure that people who are struggling receive the help that they need to live happy and healthy lives. Additionally,

adequate nutrition during infancy and early childhood is essential for child development and well-being.

The programs were created to help families and children who are in great need. As I have said before in this committee, we can disagree on what helps or what hurts, but our goals are the same. And I support the administration for the work that they have been doing to help guide families off of welfare, and I will fight to make sure that benefits are given to the people that need them. These are our children. We don't want them to go hungry.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN, how many children participate in the National School Lunch Program annually?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Approximately 30 million.

Mrs. MILLER. Would school-age children who are statutorily eligible for the program continue to qualify for reduced lunch program priced meals?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Yes, ma'am, they would.

Mrs. MILLER. As I mentioned in my testimony, this issue is extremely important in my district. I mean, our—West Virginia has struggled. The proposed rule does not affect the eligibility requirements for child nutrition programs. Is that correct?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. It does not directly affect the eligibility as laid out for that program in law.

Mrs. MILLER. OK. In the State of the Union Address on Tuesday, the President highlighted that 7 million Americans have come off of food stamps. This number is exciting when it means that there are people who are now financially stable and can provide for their families. In Fiscal Year 2017, there were an estimated 42.2 million monthly SNAP participants. In Fiscal Year 2020, participants estimated that there were 36.4 million. That's a big difference.

In your opinion, is it safe to assume that the 7 million off of food stamps are a result of a stronger economy?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Oh, there's no question about it. A record number of open jobs, record number of people going back to work. There have also been reforms done at the state level that have helped spur this change. Work requirements have come back into effect in a number of states, and we've seen great results with people moving from welfare to work and back into the work force.

Mrs. MILLER. I'd like to hear more about your time that you spent in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. You oversaw operations for their welfare programs. What were the most important key takeaways from your experience, and how do they relate to today's discussion?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Sure. Thank you for that question. Just as it relates to BBCE, I can tell you a little bit more about what I saw and why this has this connection to fraud.

When someone is approved through BBCE, and 97 percent of all people on food stamps in BBCE states are approved through BBCE, there is no asset check at all. So, what happens is information that would normally be available to you as an agency to determine and verify their status, household composition, income sources, other things like that, the agency does not even look at at all. So, the challenge there is it opens the door to fraud, as I mentioned. The GAO said people who come in through BBCE are three times more likely to have errors. And in 2011, the Obama Adminis-

tration actually stopped looking at BBCE cases for payment errors. So, that isn't even reflected in this percentage of fraud that folks are referencing.

Mrs. MILLER. How many people would that be?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Well, it's hard to come up with an exact number because we don't check assets now. So just a quick example, the largest fraud case in Maine history, over \$200,000 a woman stole. She didn't report that her husband lived with her. Well, she was on the program through BBCE, and so her assets weren't checked. When they later found this fraud through a report, they looked at her bank accounts and her husband was listed as a joint owner of the bank account. That was fraud that could have been caught had we checked things like assets at the front door, which BBCE does not allow.

Mrs. MILLER. OK. I yield back my time.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Thank you.

I think that we should always make sure to check 100 percent of the witnesses' statistics at this point for their validity.

Let me turn the questioning over to Chairwoman Maloney for five minutes of questioning.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank all of you for sharing your testimony today.

In your opening statements, you detailed how vital SNAP is to combat hunger in this Nation. So, I'm stunned that the Trump administration is taking action that will result in 3.1 million individuals losing their SNAP eligibility.

Ms. DAVIS, while food insecurity is a very personal and intimate issue that a family may face, it's unfortunately not uncommon in our country. How many people across this country experience food insecurity each year?

Ms. DAVIS. According to the latest data from USDA, more than 37 million people live in food-insecure households in the U.S. That includes 11.3 million children or one in seven of our Nation's kids. People living with food insecurity are found in every county, in every congressional district across our Nation, urban, suburban, and rural.

And while that number is still much, much too high, I would point out that child food insecurity has declined to the lowest point since 1998, and that is due in large part by actions taken by previous administrations and bipartisan congressional access to strengthen access to SNAP for families with children.

Mrs. MALONEY. OK. What are the long-term consequences to a child's health and well-being if they experience food insecurity in childhood?

Ms. DAVIS. Those consequences are very profound. Food-insecure children have higher rates of poor mental and physical health. They're more likely to be hospitalized, to suffer from common illnesses like stomach aches and colds, asthma. Adolescents experiencing food insecurity face a host of mental health issues and are at a much greater risk for depression and other mental health problems, including suicidal ideation.

A report published by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University highlights nutrition as a key foundational pillar for healthy child development. Food access and intake are crit-

ical issues that do impact a child's lifelong health trajectory, and the cognitive delays that food-insecure children face put them behind their peers at kindergarten and for years to come.

Mrs. MALONEY. Yet instead of proposing measures that would help to reduce food insecurity in this Nation, the administration has proposed a new rule that takes SNAP benefits away from 3.1 million children and people.

Ms. Sullivan, you are a mother, and I can only imagine the struggle that you face to provide food for your children each day. Can you explain how important SNAP has been to your children?

Ms. SULLIVAN. Absolutely. You know, there have been times as a parent, you know, there's probably no worse feeling that you could experience than putting your children to bed on an empty belly. And I think back to those times where I've been there, and I was, as a breastfeeding mother, unable to take in calories on my—for myself to then produce enough milk to sustain my newborn daughter at the time, who then as a result of the physical impacts of not taking in enough calories, she herself was—had to then attend physical and occupational therapy to rebound. This—we're talking about a newborn.

So, in the times when SNAP has been available to me, because one thing—let me just make one thing clear. Normally, families—I have myself—I will wait until the very last minute, because there's nothing—to me, it is a very traumatic experience to walk into a state office and ask for assistance, and it's a reminder of you've hit rock bottom. You're—you know, just of the intense trauma of the moment.

In those times when I've been able to access SNAP benefits that we're eligible for, I am able to provide for my family. Again, doing what we all want to do. Healthy snacks that my children are able to grab on their, you know, their way from school to work to their activities. Literally just having enough food to put on the table. So many times, I have literally cried myself to sleep, and I know I am not alone in this. There are millions of us out there, because I didn't eat myself that day and was uncertain of how I would feed my children the next day. And this is the reality, the reality that so many of us face.

Mrs. MALONEY. Ms. Toney, and Principal Pethan, how would the administration's proposal affect the ability of the children in your school to come to school ready to learn?

Ms. TONEY. Thank you for your question, Congresswoman. Our kids, in order to be their best selves in school, need to come with a full belly and with the knowledge and the thought that they will be food secure. Academically, students learn best when they feel secure in their food, when they are not experiencing a thought of where will my next meal come from? What am I going to face when I go home? Will there be food at home? They come to school for the meal, many of the students in my district do.

And if we are talking about making them academically successful, physically successful, emotionally successful, and mentally successful, food security plays a large role in the bigger picture of that through a lot of different ways, through the stigmatization that Mr. Pethan had spoken about in his oral testimony, to the academic well-being, the physical well-being, being healthy enough to be in

the classroom, to not miss class for doctors' appointments or hospitalizations or anything like that.

Food insecurity plays such an important role in the larger picture, and we oftentimes look at it as a secondary thing, but it is absolutely not. I'm here to say it is a primary concern among the people in my district, because I've heard a lot of talking points today about a booming economy. I live—I've been born, raised, and lived my adult life in the Third congressional District of West Virginia. We are one of the poorest congressional districts in the Nation. And I'm here to tell you that in my rural areas, the economy is not booming, and the kids need this help. These—we talk about bootstraps. These are the boots for these kids. This is the help they need.

Thank you.

Mrs. MALONEY. My time has expired. I yield back.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you. Thank you, Chairwoman.

I'd now like to recognize Ranking Member Cloud for five minutes of questioning.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If I could just start off by saying, Ms. Sullivan, and to the rest of you all, I mentioned that I appreciate you all being here. Ms. Sullivan, I just wanted to specifically say I appreciate you being here, and I hope you don't feel shame. That's why it's there. That's why the program's there, and I do think it takes courage to be here today to tell your story;

So I do think and, honestly—I realize in the polarized environment that you're walking in from what you see on TV, a lot of times people walk into these situations with entrenched positions, but I do think there are those of us who are working to find a way to preserve the program for those who really need it, while also finding that nexus where we can also deal with issues to streamline and make it more efficient. And I think that's a good, honest conversation to have.

Mr. Adolphsen—did I pronounce that right? OK. Now, this is a little wonky. We just heard that this rule changes SNAP. Is that actually right or is that—could you—could you clarify the connection, because it's not really as direct as it's being—

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Sure. Yes, sir. So the rule that's being discussed is a change to SNAP, not to the school lunch program. The SNAP eligibility standards as set in Federal law, as have been mentioned, you cannot have income over 130 percent of the Federal poverty level, and you cannot have liquid assets available to you, cash, recreational vehicles, things you could quickly liquidate to cash in excess of 2250—\$2,250. So, the broad-based categorical eligibility loophole does away with that asset test, and it raises the income threshold to up to 200 percent in most states and up to 185 percent or 165 percent in other states.

Where the school lunch comes into play is that if you're on SNAP, you're automatically eligible for school lunch with no application. That's what some folks are talking about, that there's a group of students who may have to apply with a school lunch application. I grabbed one here from the state of Maine. It's one page. They may have to apply through that application, but they will still maintain their eligibility. It just won't be automatic.

Mr. CLOUD. And you—it was also stated that 3 million people would lose SNAP benefits, but it's actually—could you explain the difference between losing eligibility versus actually losing benefits?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Sure. So there—right now, there are approximately 5 million people who are ineligible by Federal law standards, and when this loophole is closed and broad-based categorical eligibility, that pathway is closed, it will go back to categorical eligibility. If you're actually receiving a welfare benefit, you will still be automatically eligible for food stamps. That is not changing.

The only thing that's changing is you can't get this brochure handed to you and, thus, getting rid of the asset test and increasing the income limit. That piece of it will go away. Then we'll go back to the Federal standards that are in law that Congress passed of both income and asset limits.

Mr. CLOUD. So, to rephrase it, you're basically saying that the executive branch is working to realign regulations with the stated will of Congress as passed in law?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. That's correct. The BBCE rule was created entirely through regulation. At the time, the Clinton Administration even acknowledged that the intent was to expand this to people who are actually getting a benefit, not just receiving—or in many cases, not even receiving a marginal, you know, TANF-funded brochure. And they acknowledged that at the time, but it has taken on a life of its own, obviously, as 42 states are using it, and millions of folks have come in through that pathway.

So, this rule simply reorients the eligibility policy at the practical level on the ground with what Congress actually passed in law.

Mr. CLOUD. OK. And so constitutionally, the proper way to fix this would be for Congress to act if it wants to change this rule?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Absolutely. And I mentioned in my remarks, if you want to give everyone in the country food stamps, you have the authority to do that. Pass a law and get it signed into law, and that certainly can take effect. But as the law stands right now, this regulation sits squarely outside of it, and it's really incumbent upon the administration to correct that.

Mr. CLOUD. OK. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. I'm going to use that five seconds.

Ms. Davis, okay, so basically, what's going is that they want to make a uniform \$2,250 asset test for the entire United States, and they want to say that no state can raise the income level beyond 130 percent of the poverty line, which is uniform for the entire United States.

Can you—you know, can you comment on that and why states would actually want to raise the income levels and asset test depending on what part of the country you live in? New York City versus West Virginia, for instance.

Ms. DAVIS. Yes. Thank you. First, it's easy to focus on things like, you know, a brochure gets you on to SNAP, which isn't true. Receiving a brochure guarantees no one SNAP benefits. Anyone coming in through broad-based categorical eligibility still has to go through an interview. They still have to document their income and comply with all of the other program requirements. And there

are indeed many people who might be categorically eligible for SNAP, but their net incomes are too high to get a benefit.

Congress intended to give states flexibility during welfare reform, and that is well documented. They also intended to encourage work and to encourage efficiency across programs, two things that broad-based categorical eligibility does very well. And one thing that is very important to understand, with talk of millionaires and people with airplanes, is that this policy helps working poor families with children who have incomes modestly above 130 percent of poverty, gross incomes, before deductions for things like high housing costs, high childcare costs, high out-of-pocket medical costs are deducted. And only .2 percent of SNAP benefits are going to people with net after those deduction incomes above 130 percent of poverty. So, it's not an automatic gateway. It isn't a policy benefiting millionaires, and it supports and encourages work.

And as you know, housing costs in Boston are very different from housing costs in Great Falls, Montana, where I'm from. Childcare costs are high everywhere. In many states, care for an infant can cost more per year than in-state tuition for college. So, states need this flexibility, and it helps them make work pay for their population.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you.

I would now recognize Congresswoman Porter for five minutes of questioning.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN, how much do you pay each month for electricity and how often?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. How often? Each month. You know, I could get my phone out and check exactly, but it's probably about—

Ms. PORTER. Would you?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Probably about \$180 to \$200 a month, depending on how many lights the kids leave on.

Ms. PORTER. Tell me about your children. How many do you have, may I ask?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I have three children.

Ms. PORTER. Are they school age?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. They are not. One of them is in kindergarten.

Ms. PORTER. And the other two are younger, correct?

How much and how often do you pay for sewer?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Once every four years when the septic truck comes to clean it out.

Ms. PORTER. How much and how often do you pay for house insurance or mortgage insurance?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Could you repeat that? Sorry.

Ms. PORTER. How much and how often do you pay for homeowners' insurance?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Let's see. That's once a year I purchase that policy.

Ms. PORTER. How many hours did you work weekly last week?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I don't know.

Ms. PORTER. What is your hourly rate? Do you—let me ask you this, because I don't want to invade your privacy. Do you know your hourly rate of pay as you sit here today?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Yes, ma'am, I know how much I get paid.

Ms. PORTER. Hourly?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I do not get paid hourly.

Ms. PORTER. But do—but you're going to need to know that, so do you know right now how much—

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Well—

Ms. PORTER [continuing]. you get paid calculated on an hourly basis?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN [continuing]. with all due respect, what does this have to do with the broad-based categorical eligibility?

Ms. PORTER. I respect—I actually get to ask the questions, with all due respect, and you either can answer them or refuse to answer them, which is your prerogative.

What is your—do you know your gross pay before deductions?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I do.

Ms. PORTER. Do you know what day of the week your paycheck is received on?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Yes, I do.

Ms. PORTER. What day is that?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I'm not going to answer that.

Ms. PORTER. OK. Let's go through. Do you know whether you own any certificates of deposit?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I know my financial situation quite well.

Ms. PORTER. How about your account number for your IRA, 401(k)?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. My account number? No, I don't have that handy, but I could get it in about 11 seconds.

Ms. PORTER. Tick tock. I'll wait.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I'm going to be respectful and keep my phone in my pocket as we're asked to do.

Ms. PORTER. OK. The reason I'm asking you all these things, Mr. Adolphsen, is I want to show you what the Maine application—the state of Maine's application for food supplement looks like for SNAP.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Yes, ma'am. I ran that program for four years.

Ms. PORTER. OK. This is a six-page application for SNAP. I asked you a handful of these questions. To fill all of this out—there's so many pages, I'm dropping them. I apologize. This is a handful of what you would have to fill out. This is information that is much more extensive than, for example, I am required to provide in my congressionally mandated financial disclosures as a Member of the House of Representatives to the American public.

Are you aware—let me ask you this question. Does the research—what does the research say about what happens when you increase the paperwork and informational burdens on applications for things like SNAP or cash benefits? What does the research say?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I'm not sure what research you're referring to, Representative.

Ms. PORTER. The research conducted by folks like elders for fear and others about what happens when you make the paperwork application burden longer. What happens to eligibility?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Well, I can tell you my experience in Maine administering the program was that the vast majority of applications were completed online or on the telephone, not through paper application, and we actually, under my watch, undertook a process to

streamline that even further so that it would be easy for folks to get on the computer. We set up kiosks right in the regional offices where we provided computers and support for people.

Ms. PORTER. Are those offices open on nights or weekends?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Yes. We had night and weekend hours. We actually changed our staffing rotation to give two nights of the week—

Ms. PORTER. That's great.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN [continuing]. where we stayed open into the evening.

Ms. PORTER. That's really—I really commend that. I think that's really important.

With that, I'll yield back.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Congresswoman.

You know, Ms. Davis, do you want to comment on the application forms? What type of burden does that place on applicants depending on the length of the questioning in the—in the forms?

Ms. DAVIS. A number of studies show that the more questions, the longer the form, the less likely people are to get through the process. And there have been several points today about how many of the kids who will lose direct certification through SNAP will still be eligible by filing an application. I think if you talk to any school district around the country, they will tell you that that is a challenge.

In this case, USDA itself has admitted that they do not have a plan to inform those impacted and to reach out to them to let them know their kids will be ineligible—will be eligible. I think for families that are losing SNAP and their kids are dropping out of free meals, they may assume that they are no longer eligible. Paperwork complexity, human error, stigma, there are so many barriers. And because so many kids fall through the cracks and those paper applications aren't getting done accurately or getting done at all, Congress mandated the states to do direct certification between SNAP and school meals, because it's more accurate, it's more efficient, and it's more effective for catching those kids.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Ms. Davis.

Without objection, Congressman Sarbanes shall be permitted to join the subcommittee and be recognized for questioning witnesses later.

Right now, I recognize Congressman Comer for five minutes of questioning.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And my questions are going to be centered around the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents Rule for Mr. Adolphsen. And I—let me—I apologize for the questions you got earlier. I don't know what the purpose of those were, but unfortunately, the civility and common sense in Congress is a—sometimes in a downward spiral here. It doesn't help when the Speaker of the House rips up the State of the Union right behind the President after he gives his remarks, but that's for another day. That's for another day. That's—if anyone disagrees with that, we can debate that here, but let's get back to what's important, and that's governing.

With respect to the new rule, before the December 2019 USDA rule on SNAP work requirements, how were states taking advan-

tage of the waiver systems as it relates to work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Sure. Thank you. So on the ABAWD rule, what states were doing was they were taking counties in various areas that had fairly low unemployment and they were grouping them with other unrelated counties that had high unemployment, higher unemployment, and they were getting permission to waive those work requirements kind of across the board. In California, for example, statewide waiver even among counties with two and three percent unemployment.

Mr. COMER. How many states were waiving the work requirement?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. More than 30, depending on what time period you pick.

Mr. COMER. So how does the 2019 USDA rule seek to clarify and update work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Sure. For those 18-to 49-year-old able-bodied adults with no kids, what the rule does is it simply changes the criteria to be more in line with Federal law, which says that an area that has high unemployment can receive a waiver. And so, what the rule does very generally is it makes sure that those waivers can only apply in specific areas that actually do have an economic depression or downturn.

Mr. COMER. OK. So, during your time with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, how significant was the implementation of work requirements?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. From an administrative perspective, it was no more difficult than really any of the changes that we often receive from our legislature or through regulation. We did some work to make sure that folks had a place to go to education and training, if they chose to do that, and we worked with our department of labor to set up those career center one-stops and those types of things.

Mr. COMER. Let me ask you this. Have you seen where the implementation of work requirements could have actually helped SNAP recipients?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Absolutely. We've seen that really in states across the country. Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas come to mind. We've done studies there following each individual person who work requirements applied to. Incomes more than doubled in a year. Folks went back to work in hundreds of different industries, and they're doing much better now earning more and enough to replace the benefit and more.

Mr. COMER. Right. Could you explain how USDA's December 2019 work requirement rule seeks to ensure SNAP recipients achieve self-sufficiency?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Yes. The bottom line is we've got one of the greatest economies that we've had in decades, and we have nearly 7 million open jobs. And USDA looked at these waivers and said we really need these folks, able-bodied, to get into these jobs. Get off the sidelines and into the work force. It helps them and it helps our economy.

Mr. COMER. That's exactly right. And the biggest complaint that I hear from job creators and business owners in my congressional district and throughout Kentucky, for that matter, is the fact that they cannot expand their business, they're not going to invest additional capital because they don't have confidence that they can fill the open positions that would be created.

And we already have, in my district, which is a poor district, tens of thousands of jobs open right now. And if you poll the people, the working people of my district, and ask them do you support work requirements for able-bodied adults that receive any type of welfare benefit, that would poll close to 100 percent.

So this is something that I appreciate the administration trying to adopt, and anything I can do to see that this happens, I'm certainly going to do it because that's what the people of my district want.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you. I'm just going to use that time.

Ms. Toney, 43 of 55 counties provide free meals to all students in West Virginia, thanks to categorical eligibility. What is the cost of letting these kids go hungry instead?

Ms. TONEY. We're talking about human capital, and we're talking about actual people. We're not talking about data on a spreadsheet or we're not number crunching. The cost is immense. And if we let these kids go hungry, we're playing reckless with their well-being and with their future as well, because honestly, this is the future of our country and we're leading by example.

Academically, these students need this. They need the nourishment for their brains to be able to focus, to be able to be attentive in class. And I outlined in my opening statement, if they are not attentive in class and if they are unfocused, they fall behind, which leads to behavior issues. And we all know the statistics on children who fall behind in class and who are subject to behavior issues and how that affects them in their long-term longevity in the school system, not to mention the emotional well-being, the mental well-being.

And I am proud of my district for what we've done with our universal feeding program, because we have removed a lot of the stigmatization that surrounds students that can afford lunch versus students who may be on a free or reduced lunch plan. However, that is not necessarily—that is the exception, and that is not the rule for districts across the Nation. And we really have to remember that we are looking at people; we are not looking at numbers on a spreadsheet.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you. And that question was from the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce.

Now I'd like to recognize Congresswoman Tlaib for five minutes of questions.

Ms. TLAIB. Thank you so much, Chairman. Thank you so much for your leadership and having a hearing on a really critical issue I think in our country right now.

Ms. Sullivan, yesterday, one of my residents texted me: Speak the truth even if your voice shakes. And I just want you to know I appreciated you speaking up. You spoke to—about something that I think is very important. And as a former community organizer, one of the things we do is make sure that we bring people in the room that can't be in the room. And when you spoke up, you did that. So, thank you so much.

I want to ask a question for all of you. Do you think children can learn if they're hungry? Ms. Davis.

Ms. DAVIS. Absolutely not. I think if you ask any teacher in this country or any parent, kids can't come to school hungry to learn if they're just plain hungry. And we do a survey of teachers every year, and what we find is that three out of four teachers say that they regularly teach kids who are coming to school hungry. And the data bears that out too.

Ms. TLAI B. So yes or no, Principal Pethan?

Mr. PETHAN. Absolutely not. I think everybody has been hungry at one point in their life, regardless of age, and it's very difficult to focus if you're an adult, but much less more so if you're a young child at six years old and you're trying to figure out what's going on in class. And if you don't have a stable meal in your belly when you come into school, it makes it extremely difficult.

And I would even argue that it—even if it does affect many, many students or if it's just one child in your class, as a teacher, as I'm sure Ms. Toney can explain, it takes one child sometimes that's hungry that can disrupt a class that affects all of the students in the classroom as well.

Ms. TLAI B. And I'm sorry because of the time, but yes or no?

Ms. SULLIVAN. Unequivocally no.

Ms. TLAI B. Ms. Toney.

Ms. TONEY. Resoundingly no. Hunger is painful, and students cannot bear that burden.

Ms. TLAI B. How about you? Can children learn if they're hungry, yes or no?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Not my kindergartner.

Ms. TLAI B. OK. There's been a lot of discussion about, you know, assistance, public assistance and so forth and this kind of, you know, trying to prevent fraud. You know, this always come up. And I want to tell you all, in downtown Detroit right now, I have the third poorest congressional district. They—the politicians, the elected folks there decided to shift \$400 million away from school aid fund to an adult playground downtown. It's a hockey stadium. \$400 million away from school aid fund into a for-profit hockey stadium for a billion dollar development. A billionaire was building it.

In exchange, the promise was, to qualify, to be able to say give them the green light to do it, is to hire 50 percent local residents to develop the 39 lots they got for a dollar in downtown Detroit. At the end, they didn't do any of those things. Broken promises.

Do you think that's fraud, Ms. Davis? Yes or no.

Ms. DAVIS. I don't know that I'm qualified to speak on the specifics—

Ms. TLAI B. Principal Pethan, does that sound like fraud to you, that they took public dollars, \$400 million away from school aid in exchange for promises they made that they were going to do to help

benefit the whole community and the public because they subsidized their stadium?

Mr. PETHAN. I can say that's a promise broken, and if we did that at our school, we would be subject to fraud.

Ms. TLAIB. Well, if you were on food assistance, Ms. Sullivan, they would take it away and probably make you pay.

Ms. SULLIVAN. Sounds like fraud to me.

Ms. TLAIB. Yes. How about you, Ms. Toney?

Ms. TONEY. It sounds like fraudulent behavior and immoral behavior.

Ms. TLAIB. Exactly. How about you, sir?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Yes, ma'am. It sounds like fraud to me.

Ms. TLAIB. Absolutely. Do you know what we could have done with that \$400 million? Not only feed children, but we could have funded 218 new teachers in the Detroit public school system, where we had a deficit of 200 teachers before the school year began. That's what we're doing. But we do not talk about them as committing fraud.

When moms accidentally don't bring in their wage stuff. You know, I get calls all the time. I didn't—I didn't submit the documents in time. Can you help me? Or, you know, this was off, or they were doing an asset test on a car that they got from their mother, all of that. Ding, ding, it's fraud. Where a company that is making billions of dollars and selling concert tickets, everything. We're literally—Cass Tech High School in my district, that is—you can see it from the stadium, down the street from the stadium. We had to shut down the drinking fountains because the water is contaminated.

These are the things that we're doing. We're shifting away these public dollars that could be used to feed children, because they cannot learn if they're hungry. But we don't call that fraud. We call a mother trying to feed her children and do everything possible to do it. And sometimes—I mean, it's food. It is food. Not fur coats. Not a membership to a golf course. It is food for your children. Food for your family. It is food. And I'm tired of us treating them completely differently, especially when it's a billion-dollar development that just makes more money off of the backs of our kids.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, and I hope you all continue to speak truth. I think it's critically important. Thank you very much.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I now recognize Congressman Khanna for five minutes of questioning.

Mr. KHANNA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Sullivan, I was struck by your testimony, particularly this line: Shall I revert to the days when I would casually pass up an opportunity to eat today so that my children have a better chance of eating tomorrow?

If you don't mind, could you speak about times in your life that you may have had to do that?

Ms. SULLIVAN. Yes. Thank you. And I do hope that other members of the committee do have the time and the opportunity to read through my full written testimony.

It was a challenge for me. It forces me to relive these very traumatic experiences. And honestly, I think some of it I've kind of

blocked out, to the best of my ability. And that's, again, the reality of what so many of us deal with.

You know, there have been those times when I've looked—I've prepared the best of what I could for a meal, and I'm a great cook, and I've had to ration out food. And as I rationed it out, I'm looking at the plate of one child and the other and sort of based on age and where they are and what I feel that they need for nourishment was, again, rationing out this food, and then it gets to me, and of course, as a parent, you put yourself last. And that's not, you know, singular to me. It's what we do as parents, as providers.

And so there have been on numerous occasions—you know, SNAP has come into my life in times of need, and then I've been able to walk away. I'm—I've been sometimes what's called a churner. I've been on and off the program, and it's helped—it's done exactly what it's been intended to do. But as I said, as parents, there is shame associated with it, when we are walking into these spaces where basically the police are trying to keep us from accessing these programs that are intended to assist us, and we're looked at as a fraud before somebody in need.

And I can't speak enough to what that does to a person's—you know, of course, we can imagine and envision what physically that does to a person, but mentally what it does to a parent who is, again, just trying to provide the best for their children.

Mr. KHANNA. Thank you for sharing such a personal story.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN, if Ms. Sullivan came to you and she said she's at 140 percent of Federal poverty line, and she told you her story, would you believe that she should get food stamps? Yes or no.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I would follow the eligibility standards.

Mr. KHANNA. So if she came to you and she said, look, I'm having to skip meals and my kids are—otherwise, my kids would go hungry and I need this, and you believed it to be true, but it's 140 percent over the Federal poverty line, you would say no, she doesn't qualify?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. You know, personally, I would help, if I could—

Mr. KHANNA. While you were administrating Maine. I'm just saying, did—were these the type of cases? If someone came to you, if they were 140 percent, would you say yes, or would you say no?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Well, with BBCE, she would be eligible, so I would—I would say yes.

Ms. SULLIVAN. I would not.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. But under the Federal law, food stamp eligibility, she would be ineligible.

Mr. KHANNA. I mean, you would—so what the Trump administration is doing is trying to make her ineligible, and you would support that. You would—you would think that someone like Ms. Sullivan shouldn't get food stamps.

I just want to be clear because, you know, I saw your testimony on private planes and all that. Let's just be honest here. I mean, that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about whether someone like Ms. Sullivan, who is at 140 percent of poverty line, should get food stamps or not. Now, if you want to say that no, she shouldn't, at least that's an honest answer. And that's—you know,

we could just have a difference of values, but let's be very clear about that position.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Sir, I'm being honest, and the broad-based categorical eligibility loophole that's being closed by this rule, as I mentioned in my testimony, is much more about assets than income. And you heard from several testimonies that income is the smaller piece of this particular rule, and I'm being completely honest about what this rule does. And as a state administrator, you don't make individual determinations—

Mr. KHANNA. Let me just ask one question. My time is running up. If I could just finish. How much money would this rule save the Federal Government?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Several billion dollars.

Mr. KHANNA. How much exactly?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. It depends on the final—

Mr. KHANNA. What's your estimate?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. That has not come out yet.

Mr. KHANNA. So, I mean—so you're basically saying for 2 to \$3 billion, you don't even know how much it would save, which is less than one percent of our defense budget, you would deprive millions of Ms. Sullivan of food. I mean, that—just so we have our priorities. I mean, that's basically your policy argument to this committee?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. This is about preserving the resources for the truly needy who are eligible by Federal law.

Mr. KHANNA. Which is less than one percent of our defense budget to deprive, you know, probably a million people like Ms. Sullivan of food.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. I'm not prepared to discuss the defense budget at this food stamp hearing.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. OK. Thank you, Mr. Khanna.

I now recognize Congressman Grothman for five minutes of questioning.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Yes. I kind of want to go over this one more time. Could you one more time give us an overview of this—of the categorical eligibility and how it came about?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Certainly. So categorical eligibility is allowed in Federal food stamp law. It says if you are receiving a welfare benefit, you are automatically eligible to be enrolled in the food stamp program. That was Congress' effort to cut down on administrative and applicant burden. Fine.

What happened was the Clinton Administration came in, and they expanded that to broad-based categorical eligibility that said a welfare benefit can be as simple as getting a brochure. You don't have to get an actual benefit from this other welfare program. And by doing that, the income limit is then raised from 130 of the Federal poverty level up to 200 percent of the Federal poverty level, and the asset test is completely eliminated through that process.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. And do you know off the top of your head what 200 percent of Federal poverty is? I used to know these numbers. I can't remember them.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. It's in the mid \$30,000 range.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. And the asset test, just like on other things, means you can be a millionaire and eligible for the program?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Yes. It ranges widely. We know from USDA data that half of these individuals have more than \$20,000 in liquid assets.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Is there any downside that you can think of to giving—to putting people on the—the lunch program, other than just cost?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Any downside to putting people on the school lunch program?

Mr. GROTHMAN. Correct.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. As long as it complies with the standards that Congress set for the program, I see no problem with it.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Other than cost.

Mr. Pethan, I'm wondering if you could comment on your experience.

Mr. PETHAN. Yes. What I've seen with the program is that it's been very successful. In our school, we have about 57 percent of our students are coming from direct certification, which means they qualify for a SNAP benefit from a number of things, including household income. What we've seen and since we've been participating in the CEP program is that it has had a direct impact in the amount of meals that have served. In 2014 and 2015, before we had the program, we only had about 64 percent participation in the meals that we had offered. And then all the way up to this year, we've had about 96 percent participation.

So even though we did have free and reduced lunch applications in the past that students could qualify for a free or reduced meal, now we've seen a higher participation, and as a result, a direct impact on our student behavior issues.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. What I was trying to get at, Mr. Adolphsen, is sometimes it's said that when you give more benefits, it kind of affects the parents, because they have less—less responsibility for their children. I guess I'll put it that way. And it's good if you have more, I guess, buy-in on your children's upbringing.

Do you see any of that or does that argument appeal to you at all?

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Well, as the parent of children, I certainly want to be involved in their upbringing and taking care of them. I think what we're talking about, though, is for folks who are on SNAP through BBCE, they either have incomes that are in excess of the Federal limit that was set or they have resources that are available to them to take care of themselves and their families without the benefit.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I guess what I'm trying to get at, are there benefits to giving parents responsibility other than just monetary benefits to the Federal Government? And understand we're running almost a trillion dollar a year deficit, so I don't mean to minimize the cost savings. We should always be looking for the cost savings. But you read stuff about it kind of affecting parents as the government assumes more and more of that parental role.

Mr. ADOLPHSEN. Absolutely. I don't think anyone would disagree that all the literature supports that active involvement in their children's lives by the parents is critical to their success.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. I'll yield the remainder of my time.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you.

I think that the trillion dollar deficit was caused by the 2017 tax law that added almost a trillion dollars to our deficit. It's not a couple billion dollars due to SNAP benefits.

With regard to Mr. Pethan, can you please comment on what this change is going to do to the administration of your school in Wisconsin, in Sheboygan?

Mr. PETHAN. Yes. So we have—like I said in my opening testimony, we do have one of the lowest percentages of unemployment in the country, and we're very proud of that. However, a lot of our parents are not accessing that same economy. And when we talk about jobs, I think it's fair to mention that there is a difference in the quality of job or the pay that parents are eligible for. Certainly, there are jobs that can provide a family wage and there are some that cannot, which force parents, like I said, to make a decision between being there for your child or picking up a second job and trying to work that.

As far as the administration in our school, we talk frequently about the stigma that some of our parents and students have about participating in the program. Before we were able to offer this to everybody, our staff didn't feel it was comfortable to bring breakfast in the classroom by having some students watch another student eat. By doing this and participating in the CEP program directly, which is the result—

Mr. KHANNA. CEP means community eligibility?

Mr. PETHAN. Eligibility provision, yes. And what that means is that now we can offer this breakfast in the classroom to all of our students, and that is something that our teachers have extreme buy-in in, and they see the value and they can see the benefit. Our data proves that, and we're very happy with this program. And to roll this back would force us again to make tough choices where we are going to have to give some food to some students and others would not, simply because their parents missed a box on an eligibility form.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. That sounds crazy to me.

Congresswoman, can you please educate us with your questions?

Ms. PRESSLEY. First, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to enter into the record, with unanimous consent, the long-form SNAP benefits from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services that was referenced by my colleague, Representative Porter.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you again for holding this critically important hearing. And thank you to our witnesses for sharing your devastating, albeit compelling testimony.

I'm really just having a hard time here, because just the stereotyping and the criminalizing and the vilifying of the poor. Being poor is not a character flaw. There but for the grace of God go all of us. Hardship does not discriminate. It is transcendent. And I'm so tired of my colleagues on the other side. We had a hearing in another committee about student debt and the impact of this \$1.6 trillion crisis on credit reports. And in that hearing, they made assumptions about, well, if you can't afford it, then just don't take out the loans, when we have veterans who are defaulting on student loans because of multiple deployments.

Stop stereotyping who is struggling, because under this administration, more people are struggling than ever before, because Donald J. Trump, if nothing else, is an equal opportunity offender and abuser. This is child abuse. That's it. The cruelty is the point. And so far as I'm concerned, this administration has blood on their hands because of humanitarian crisis at the border, because of money that has been allocated but not released to Puerto Rico, because of the scourge of public health—the public health crisis and violence—that is, gun violence that they refuse to act on, and now starving children. The cruelty is the point.

And then, the occupant of this White House in a so-called State of the Union Address, when your stories tell the truth of the state of our union, a so-called State of the Union Address which turned into a divisive campaign rally speech, and there are so many outright lies and baseless claims, I can barely keep up. But he has the nerve to then evoke God and faith and to express a newfound interest in ensuring, quote, that every baby has the best chance to thrive and grow, unquote. And to remind us, quote, that every human life is a sacred gift from God, unquote.

Well, the autoimmune disease alopecia universalis has robbed me of my hair, but it has not robbed me of my memory. And I spent plenty of time in Sunday school. In Matthew 25:35, this administration has forgotten about the least of these. So this is an ironic assertion to come from this administration, putting more than 3 million individuals—pushing them off of SNAP, including more than 1 million children.

In Massachusetts, more than 100,000 people stand to lose access to benefits, including 72,000 children. It's very apropos during this time of year to quote Dr. King, but who doesn't get quoted enough is Coretta. She said starving a child is violence. Punishing a mother and her family is violence. And consent for poverty is violence.

Let me be clear. This administration's attack on SNAP is nothing more than violence waged on the most vulnerable among us, our children, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, the poor, and the sick.

So, by a show of hands, how many of our panelists believe that the Trump administration's eligibility changes to the SNAP program will ensure that our children have the resources they need to thrive and to grow? By a show of hands, who believes these changes will ensure that?

So, it appears that most of us are not fooled. And once again, as is always the case with this administration, the cruelty is the point.

So, let's unpack the real impact the Trump administration's proposed changes will have on children. And I know I'm running out of time here. So, we've spoken already about the destabilizing effects of this on learning and on health holistically. But, Ms. Sullivan and Ms. Davis, if you would speak to the long-term effects, not just the short-term, what immediately shows up, but the long-term effects of food insecurity or starving a child.

Ms. SULLIVAN. Yes. And I have, again, lived the experience. I've been homeless with my children, experienced hunger during those times, and I've had children who have been held back in school. Again, I can speak to the personal trauma, but there are public

costs that are associated with this, children repeating grades. The cost to the medical—you know, for medical expenses to respond to the physical fallout. And again, I talked about what that does to a parent mentally. It's very traumatizing, and our children feel that, and they live that, even though we try our best to protect them from that.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Congresswoman Pressley.

Congressman Sarbanes, you're now recognized for five minutes.

Mr. SARBANES. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. And thank you all for your testimony. Very, very much appreciate it.

You know, when I'm thinking about these new rules that the Trump administration has rolled out, I was reminded—I went back to try to find this—of Ed Meese who was our Attorney General at one point under President Reagan. He made a comment where he said that—that people go to soup kitchens because the food is free and that's easier than paying for it. He just thought it was a convenience thing.

And I remember the outcry at that time, the callousness of that comment and perspective on things. People don't reach for these benefits or take advantage of the opportunity to access SNAP benefits because it's just more convenient than going to a restaurant or paying for it at a supermarket. They go because they have a desperate need for it. And it's offensive to suggest, either explicitly as Ed Meese did 30 years ago, or to suggest implicitly by rolling out this kind of a new policy, that that's the case.

I bring to this discussion a conviction that our schools are a tremendous opportunity to respond to the needs of children across the country, both in terms of nutrition, which is what we are speaking to today, and health. I'm a very strong proponent, as I know many of my colleagues are here, for bolstering school-based health centers. But, obviously, that works in concert with making sure that nutrition is available to young people for all the reasons that you've discussed and discussed very powerfully, and I thank you for that testimony.

So, I wanted to ask kind of a more open-ended question, and whoever wants to answer is invited to do so. And that is, does America know that we are hungry? It's incredible to me that so many millions of Americans, including millions of children, are going to bed hungry every night in this country of tremendous wealth. Now, I know that people are charitable and they're generous. You look at food drives. You look at the food banks across the country.

So, do we not know that we're going hungry in this country? Are we—are we hiding it away? I mean, hearings like this one bring momentary focus to the question, but the more you pull back the curtain on this data, the more unbelievable it is.

So just speak to that, because you—you all are testifying and operating in a place where there's that heightened awareness and sensitivity to this issue, but you must scratch your head from time to time and just wonder, how is it that we don't bring this more into the open and address it in a more direct fashion? So, I invite anybody to respond to that.

Ms. TONEY. Congressman, thank you. That's a fascinating question. And I think those of us on the front lines are aware. Unfortunately, if you have never experienced food insecurity or been around someone who is experiencing food insecurity, you sit from a point of privilege, and it's hard to look past that for some of America. I'm afraid so.

But, also, there's another piece to this, Congressman, and it's when we are constantly being bombarded with this administration's talking points of stereotypes and people are poor, people are lazy. We are attacking them as a person. We are attacking their dignity. And when we are constantly—when America is constantly bombarded by those talking points, it permeates our culture.

We know better. The panelists on this—at this table know better. We work on the front lines, in the trenches with this issue every day or we have experienced it firsthand. Unfortunately, we have a hill to climb or a mountain to overcome with some of the other issues that bombard the American people and the points—or the places of privilege that some people may come from.

Mr. PETHAN. I think it's downright shameful that we ignore this fact that's going on, and I think if you're not seeing it every single day and you understand the effects that it has on our future, it's scary. It's scary. And I think the problem is big and I feel like it's kind of the overwhelming sense, so we try to bury it away and try to not pretend that we see it.

I would agree, I think that if you're seeing parents—and I work with a lot of parents who are in this situation—they all want what's best for their kids. I have never met a parent in my years of education that I have ever seen where they want their kid to do poor or they don't want them to be successful in the future. All of the parents that I have ever met or my experience have been wanting their kids to be better. And they look for opportunities, not because it's convenient for them, but because they need help, and I feel like that's my responsibility as a leader of a school. And if that's the opportunity that I have to help, that's what I'm going to do.

Mr. SARBANES. Thanks for your testimony.

And just in yielding back, Mr. Chairman, I'd say that I see in Baltimore every day there's a hidden America. It's completely hidden away, and it's cloaked in poverty and hunger and despair and frustration, that then leads to violence. And somehow, we have found a way collectively in this country to close that door and turn our eyes away from it. And it's to the—it will haunt us as a Nation.

And I want to thank you for your—for convening the hearing to bring some light to this issue. I hope we can continue the focus.

And, again, I want to thank the panelists for your testimony.

I yield back.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, everybody.

I think that what we've seen today is that SNAP works. SNAP helps people. It helps adults. It helps children. It helps educators. It helps the economy. It has the lowest fraud rate of practically any government program.

So, what's the point? What's the real point going on here behind trying to cut back the eligibility requirements? I think it's politics. I think it's politics. It's an effort to show that we are being tough

on poor people, and in doing so, hoping that they correct their ways, that they work harder, that they—that they freeload less, and that they be better people. But, actually, the people who utilize these benefits are just like you and me. In fact, I was one of those people. At the end of the day, what we do with SNAP defines who we are as a country.

And to Donald Trump, I would just say, do not go forward with this rule. Do not attack our children. As the late, great Chairman Cummings said, we are better than this.

I'd like to now finally recognize Congressman Connolly for five minutes of questioning.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Forgive me for being in and out of this hearing, but I've had other commitments this morning but followed the hearing. And had one of our own yesterday in my subcommittee on the impact of moving to a chained CPI on poverty programs, antipoverty programs across the board.

Ms. DAVIS, one of the characteristics, as I understand it, of SNAP is it gives some flexibility at the statewide level. Can you explain that?

Ms. DAVIS. Absolutely. One of the reasons why Congress has reaffirmed broad-based categorical eligibility several times over the past 20 years is recognizing that states have different circumstances. The cost of housing is different in L.A. than it is in southwest Virginia. Childcare costs may differ.

But I think one thing that all states value and that Congress has reinforced is the need to help support families as they work their way out of poverty, by being able to increase their earnings and to accumulate modest assets. Research shows that if families are able to build assets, they're less likely to be plunged deeper into poverty and deeper into the safety net by one misstep.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So, the point is the states are given the flexibility to take cognizance of cost of living differences. Big difference between living in Birmingham, Alabama, and living in Fairfax, Virginia.

Ms. DAVIS. Absolutely.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Or New York City. And the current program gives them that flexibility.

What would happen if the new—the Trump administration policy, as proposed, were to go into effect with respect to that flexibility?

Ms. DAVIS. I think that it would be very burdensome on states. That is why if you look at—

Mr. CONNOLLY. If the flexibility changed.

Ms. DAVIS. If the flexibility were taken away, states would face a great burden. If you look at the 183,000 comments submitted on this rule, you will see hundreds from different state agencies, local organizations and the like, talking about how devastating it will be for communities, for families, for schools, and for others in the state. And states will incur millions of dollars in costs having to retrofit their determinations systems, to train employees, and all of the other pieces that come with implementing a change of this magnitude.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So just looking at who could be affected by this, as I understand it, 3.1 million families with kids could be affected, could actually have the eligibility for SNAP affected, if this regulation were changed and regulations were to go into effect. That's a pretty large number.

Ms. DAVIS. It is very significant. Three million people who, you know, more than 2 million of whom are families with children, the rest seniors and individuals with disabilities, losing SNAP would obviously impact those families significantly, leading to higher healthcare costs, poor health. But communities would also lose out, because as the chairman talked about earlier, SNAP has a multiplier effect. Those dollars get spent immediately. 80 percent of SNAP is spent in the first two weeks, 97 percent by the end of the month, and they support farmers, truckers, grocery stores, jobs, and dollars in the community. So, there is this ripple effect.

Mr. CONNOLLY. It's a really good point you make, because I remember meeting with some folks in rural Virginia, talking about the subject several years ago. And I was shocked when they told me that the grocery store in their community, the only one they got, 60 percent of their business is SNAP.

So if you make fewer people eligible, it's not only a bad thing for people in terms of the nutrition and the health of their kids, but in terms of local economy, you could drive, you know, grocery stores or food chains out of business, frankly, if you really materially affect SNAP eligibility. Is that not correct?

Ms. DAVIS. Yes. That impact would be widespread and felt throughout the community. And we hear time and again that in areas that haven't seen a robust recovery where resources are limited, that grocery stores stagger staffing to account for when benefits are being loaded up onto cards because that is when the shopping occurs.

And, again, CBO reaffirmed recently that as far as stimulus is concerned, SNAP has one of the biggest bangs for the buck. Because those funds are spent immediately, they go into the economy and help create and maintain jobs, economic activity, and support industries from manufacturing, to trucking, to growing.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, I want to thank the chairman for holding this hearing. It's the second in our series in terms of real impacts on real people, fellow Americans and their kids. And so, I think, you know, there's real value in trying to highlight this issue.

And I want to thank all of you for joining us today.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this hearing.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you, Congressman.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for their testimony today.

Without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair. Those will be forwarded to the witnesses for responses. I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:09 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

