



**Chairman Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.**  
**Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies**  
**Hearing: Food and Nutrition Service: Policy and Program Overview**  
**Date: October 16, 2019**

The Subcommittee will come to order.

Good morning and welcome to today's hearing.

Testifying before the subcommittee today is Brandon Lipps, the Deputy Under Secretary of the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services. Thank you for being here.

I am looking forward to today's discussion. The Food and Nutrition Service is the largest mission area at USDA, in terms of budget size.

In the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bill passed by the House in June, the Food and Nutrition Service's budget, including mandatory and discretionary resources, totaled more than \$100 billion. FNS is responsible for overseeing 15 domestic nutrition assistance programs, which millions of the nation's most vulnerable populations rely on to feed their children and put a good, healthy meal on the table.

I often say that the work of this subcommittee touches the lives of every citizen on a daily basis. This is especially true for the programs administered by FNS. In FY 2020, nearly 6.4 million women, infants, and children are estimated to participate in WIC. For SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, the number is 38 million. And in 2020 an estimated 5.28 billion school lunches and snacks will be served through the National School Lunch Program.

The research is clear – providing, and expanding access to, healthy, nutritious food improves children's academics and their overall health. Food insecurity is not only a health issue, but also a national security issue. Fort Benning is in my district, and I often hear that the bone density in young

recruits is not good because growing up they did not have enough nutritious food. This is a serious issue!

Unfortunately, I think there is a tendency, by some, to want to reflexively reduce the cost of programs without thinking about the individuals who will be harmed by such actions. That is why I was alarmed when the administration proposed a rule that would essentially eliminate broad-based categorical eligibility – a move that could kick an estimated 3.1 million people off SNAP and jeopardize school meals for more than 500,000 children.

Congress had this debate during the Farm Bill. The final bill did not include tightened eligibility criteria. Nor did it include stricter work requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents. Yet, the administration is ignoring Congress and instead moving forward with executive action to address these policies on their own.

It may be easy and politically expedient to point to one millionaire in Minnesota who purposefully defrauded the American government and taxpayers as a publicity stunt. But that one individual is not representative of all SNAP recipients and we all know the truth is more complicated than that.

I, like everyone else, believes in program integrity, but let's be clear, USDA is not kicking 3.1 million millionaires off SNAP. No, USDA is kicking 3.1 million vulnerable people off SNAP.

I worry that this will disproportionately impact working families with children trying to climb out of poverty. In 2017, SNAP lifted 3.4 million people, including 1.5 million children out of poverty. The economy is still not working for everyone and the Administration should not make it worse by decimating one of our most effective safety net programs.

The Secretary's motto is "Do right and feed everyone." I like that saying and it is a worthy goal. But when children will go hungry because of your policy proposals, you are failing to live up to your own standard.

Finally, I want to conclude with how alarmed and troubled I am at the constant stream of news articles about school districts shaming low-income students over their school lunch debt. It is unfathomable to me that anyone would shame and punish children for their parent's or guardian's inability to afford school meals. Shaming students is not going to solve the problem and it is certainly not going to make kids more food secure.

As you can tell, there is a lot to discuss today. I again want to thank our witness, Deputy Undersecretary Lipps for being with us and look forward to our discussion.

Before we begin, I want to say that I am very proud of the Agriculture Appropriations bill the House passed in June and I look forward to conferencing with the Senate this fall and enacting a strong FY 2020 budget for FNS and all USDA programs.