

**Written Statement of Representative James P. McGovern (MA-02)**

Testimony before the House Budget Committee: FY2020 Members' Day

March 6, 2019

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Chairman Yarmuth, Ranking Member Womack, and members of the House Committee on the Budget, I thank you for holding today's hearing and for extending the opportunity to testify on my legislative priorities for the upcoming year.

Given my history of work on anti-hunger policy, my priorities this year will come as little surprise—today I am here today to advocate for federal nutrition programs that help our most vulnerable constituents, and to highlight why these programs continue to need our unwavering protection and attention as this Committee works to craft a Budget Resolution for Fiscal Year 2020.

I'll start by highlighting why nutrition programs are important: In 2018, a monthly average of 40.3 million people participated in SNAP. That's 1 in 8 Americans. More than **68%** are families with children, **33%** are elderly or have disabilities, and over 1.3 million are veterans. The average participant is provided with less than \$1.40 per meal.

SNAP stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—and the term “supplemental” is not just a coincidence. In most homes, SNAP assistance only covers a fraction of a low-income family's food budget, and the average time that families participate in SNAP is less than a year.

Since the President assumed power in 2017, nutrition programs have been under constant attack. These attacks are often framed as “cost savings” and ultimately create more problems than they solve.

On December 20, 2018, the Trump Administration proposed a rule that was specifically rejected for inclusion in the Farm Bill Reauthorization that was signed into law last year. This rule threatens the eligibility of SNAP participants who are considered able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs). In an effort to—ironically—“restore self-sufficiency through the dignity of work” their rule stigmatizes SNAP participants and limits a state's ability waive 20-hour work requirements. ABAWDs are a complex group, many of which are veterans, young adults who have aged out of the foster care system, ex-felons who were products of mass incarceration, and workers who aren't given 20-hours of work per week. 75% of SNAP participants do work, but often in jobs that are either unstable or that don't pay enough to prevent food insecurity. It's not that ABAWDs are jobless by choice—many are jobless because they lack privilege and are trying to get on their feet.

As if the proposed rule wasn't enough, the President's Administration also appears to be manipulating the Republican majority in the Senate to starve the *American citizens* of Puerto Rico. By refusing to take up the Supplemental Appropriations bill we sent them during the shutdown in January, Leader McConnell is doing the President's dirty work by failing to provide disaster relief funds for Puerto Rico's Nutrition Assistance Program.

In the coming months, the Trump Administration has also announced their intention to propose changes to “categorical eligibility.” Categorical Eligibility—or Cat-el—is language that is used to determine whether a family is automatically eligible for SNAP if they already qualify for certain low-income programs. Cat-El is fine as it is because it eliminates redundancy and minimizes hurdles that low-income families must overcome just to keep-up with their basic needs. While the President has yet to announce forthcoming changes, given the tone of recent attacks, I don’t have much optimism.

The Trump Administration is trying to “solve” problems that don’t exist.

Last week in a House Committee on Agriculture hearing, I asked Secretary Perdue for the specific data that was used to justify some of Trump’s policies. I’m looking forward to receiving their response because in all my years, I have never seen data that spins taking away food assistance as something positive.

The President and his Administration have no regard for low-income, working class families. The funds we allocate to help American families out of hard times are the last line of defense and they continue to need our support.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, there are those who assert that SNAP and other social safety net programs are too expensive to maintain. I suggest that the Committee consider options like reducing funds for things like low-yield nuclear weapons, or close corporate tax loopholes, to balance the budget to cover the costs of anti-hunger and safety net programs. Your work and oversight are vital to the health of American families.

That is why this year and for the rest of the 116th Congress, I request your assistance in both prioritizing funding for nutrition assistance programs and in using Committee instructions to stop the President from overruling the will of Congress on targeted work requirements. We all bear the responsibility in working to end hunger, and I will continue to advocate fiercely for our most vulnerable communities.