



May 8, 2018

The Honorable Jim Jordan  
Chairman  
Health Care, Benefits & Administrative  
Rules Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives  
2430 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Ranking Member  
Health Care, Benefits & Administrative  
Rules Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives  
2204 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Gary Palmer  
Chairman  
Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives  
2430 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jamie Raskin  
Ranking Member  
Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives  
2204 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Jordan and Palmer and Ranking Members Raskin and Krishnamoorthi:

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh-in on recent efforts in the Nutrition Title to incorporate employment and training initiatives. NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, which has over 110,000 supporters nationwide, promotes policies that mend the economic gaps and bridge the social divides in our country. In our advocacy work we hold-up employment opportunities and fair wages as critical components of social and economic justice; we support effective, evidence-based employment and training programs. As a faith-based organization, we also believe in the moral imperative of ending hunger; we want to see programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) protected and strengthened.

We find the House Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R. 2) to be wholly unacceptable due to the drastic changes it would make to SNAP. This crucial and effective program prevents 1 in 8 Americans, 42 million people across the country, from going hungry. SNAP is a vital anti-hunger program for families and individuals—an estimated 84 percent of all SNAP benefits go to households which include a child, an elderly person, or a person with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> The draconian work requirements included in H.R. 2 would hurt our brothers and sisters living in poverty and would drastically increase food insecurity in our nation.

We see H.R. 2 as a tragic, missed opportunity to strengthen SNAP and to make meaningful investments in job training and education programs. Low-wage workers need real opportunities to move up the economic ladder. Instead, H.R. 2 diverts effective nutrition benefits funds into underfunded workforce development programs which are then delegated to states to build and manage. It will not only fail to provide real opportunities to SNAP recipients, but will result in loss of nutrition assistance in the process. What is currently an efficient, well-functioning anti-hunger program will become an ineffectual bureaucratic barrier to people that need food.

**Below are some of the reasons NETWORK Lobby strongly opposes workforce solutions as proposed in H.R. 2.**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://frac.org/news/not-broken-fix-draft-farm-bill-puts-unnecessary-burdens-low-income-people>

- The funds diverted from effective nutrition assistance would be wholly insufficient to meet the needs of all those at risk of losing SNAP due to stricter work requirements. The new funding provided in the bill for job training and workforce development slots would amount to just \$30 per month for those recipients who need placement to retain SNAP benefits<sup>2</sup>.
- Rather than investing dollars in the appropriate agency of jurisdiction to improve and support existing programs<sup>3</sup>, H.R. 2 proposes creating a new, poorly-funded skills and training program through USDA and paying for it with funds meant to provide food to the hungry.
- Requiring work by threatening to take away food assistance does not help people overcome what are often complex and difficult barriers to employment. Minimally funded employment training slots would fail to help substantial numbers of low-income people with various barriers to employment — such as very limited skills, undiagnosed disabilities, lack of child care and transportation, or family members with illness.
- SNAP already has work requirements. These existing requirements would be expanded to apply to parents of children over 7 years old and to older adults up to 59 years old and made more punitive. Those who can't comply would face harsh consequences — losing benefits for 12 months upon their first failure; each subsequent failure would lock individuals out of the program for 36 months.
- Most SNAP recipients who can work, already do work. By expanding work requirements and adding unnecessary red-tape to access nutrition assistance, this bill would create discouraging red-tape and unnecessary burdens for millions of Americans already struggling to get by.
- Eliminating the broad-based categorical eligibility option available, utilized by 42 states, would punish millions of low-income working households that would no longer qualify for assistance and face steep benefit cliffs.
- The objective of reducing food stamp rolls does not translate to people reaching self-sufficiency. While H.R. 2 will save \$9 billion over ten years from individuals losing SNAP, most of those savings would come from households having their benefits reduced or cut; from creating more hunger. “Opting-out” of the program implies a choice; barriers to employment aren't choices.
- SNAP is vitally important for local economies. For every \$5 of SNAP benefits that are used there is a \$9 increase in local economic activity. Cuts to and funds diverted from direct benefits have ripple effects through economies and directly impact retailers and workers in the food industry. Taxpayer dollars injected directly into local economies are more productive than dollars spent to build a new, bloated bureaucracy with unclear outcomes.
- In 2013, bipartisan policymakers provided \$200 million through 2014 Farm Bill for ten major state demonstration projects to test various approaches to employment services, work programs, and work requirements for people receiving SNAP. Those programs are currently underway and expected to provide data in 2019—they are in the midst of determining how best to help SNAP recipients move towards self-sufficiency. It's premature to move forward on this unprecedented scale before gleaning what these pilot programs have to show.

On the heels of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which provided massive tax cuts to corporations and the wealthiest in our nation, H.R. 2 adds insult to injury with deep cuts to basic human needs supports. The work requirement provisions in H.R.2's Nutrition Title are dangerously out-of-touch with the reality of 21<sup>st</sup> Century poverty and the challenges that low-income workers face in today's economy. We implore a more reasoned and less risky approach to workforce development founded on evidence-based policies.

Sincerely,

Sister Quincy Howard, OP  
 Government Relations Fellow  
 NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cbpp.org/research/chairman-conaways-farm-bill-would-increase-food-insecurity-and-hardship#\\_ftn3](https://www.cbpp.org/research/chairman-conaways-farm-bill-would-increase-food-insecurity-and-hardship#_ftn3)

<sup>3</sup> WIOA—the Labor Department's primary workforce development program has been [chronically underfunded](#).