



AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

August 20, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture
328A Russell Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Conway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture
328A Russell Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts, Chairman Conway, and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals who champion the health of all people and communities, I write to urge the conference committee to protect and strengthen key public health provisions in the final Farm Bill conference report and to reject any provisions that would threaten public health.

We are deeply concerned by the changes proposed to the Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program included in the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R.2). SNAP provides more than 40 million low-income Americans, including people with disabilities, children, seniors, veterans and working families, with critical nutrition benefits to strengthen their food security and provide access to a nutritious diet. The House Farm Bill includes numerous harmful changes to SNAP that threaten to reverse the decades of progress the program has made in alleviating poverty and reducing food insecurity for America's most vulnerable populations.

Of greatest concern, the House Farm Bill would impose new and unnecessarily strict work requirements on many SNAP participants. This is a glaring oversight of the fact that the majority of able-bodied SNAP recipients are already employed. Moreover, SNAP has a long history of enabling economic mobility. For example, in 2015, SNAP helped 8.4 million people out of poverty, reducing the poverty rate by 17 percent¹. The new work requirements proposed in the House bill would cause millions of low-income individuals to lose benefits and would do little to increase employment. While the House bill contains these controversial provisions, the bipartisan Senate bill contains provisions that would improve the integrity of SNAP and maintain

¹ Wheaton, L., & Tran, V. (2018). *The Antipoverty Effects of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*. Retrieved from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/96521/the_antipoverty_effects_of_the_supplemental_nutrition_assistance_program_2.pdf

the accessibility of this vital nutrition program for families who rely on it for affordable and nutritious food.

We are keenly aware of the chronic health problems associated with poor nutrition and food insecurity. Chronically malnourished children demonstrate poorer school outcomes, are at risk for learning problems and developmental delays and exhibit more behavioral problems. Food-insecure adults may need more time off from work for health reasons and are at increased risk of diabetes, hypertension and other chronic diseases. Food insecurity is also associated with adverse mental health outcomes and heightened levels of physical and mental stress. We strongly urge the Farm Bill conference committee to reject the draconian work requirements included in the House bill and to instead support the SNAP provisions as proposed in the Senate version of the Farm Bill, which improve the integrity of this critical anti-hunger program.

We also urge the committee to reject any provisions that would weaken or prevent laws that protect the public from pesticides and to oppose provisions that would weaken or eliminate key conservation programs. These programs are important for the long-term sustainability of agricultural lands, the health of their surrounding communities and the economic continuity of local farms and retailers who expand access to healthy food in our communities.

We believe a Farm Bill that prioritizes public health is critical to ensuring the health of our nation. As the conference committee works to finalize a conference report, we strongly urge you to develop a Farm Bill that reduces hunger, improves nutrition and maintains important conservation and environmental health protections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD
Executive Director

Cc: House and Senate Farm Bill Conference Committee Members