

July 18, 2023

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Scott, Chairwoman Stabenow, and Ranking Member Boozman,

Higher education provides individuals the opportunity to pursue the education and training necessary to change their socioeconomic trajectory, ultimately enabling them to be more productive contributors to the American workforce. Unfortunately, barriers outside of the classroom, including access to food, can impede a student’s ability to stay enrolled and complete their degree. Food insecurity among college students is becoming more common, with over one-third of students struggling to afford food and groceries.

While the federal government provides subsidies for low-income individuals to purchase food through the Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), current rules are complicated for students to follow and for agencies to implement, ultimately limiting access for intended beneficiaries. There is widespread agreement that SNAP rules for students are overly burdensome and prevent eligible students from accessing the benefit. The Government Accountability Office estimates that just 31% of college students who meet SNAP income limits reported receiving benefits, a much lower share than the general eligible population. Opportunities exist to make it easier for students who meet SNAP income limits and requirements to qualify for the benefit using data that is already verified by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other sources.

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to offer a simplified pathway to food assistance to better meet the needs of today’s college students. Specifically, we ask you to modernize the college student SNAP eligibility criteria in the Farm Bill reauthorization and

consider adding the following exemptions for students who also meet income and asset requirements of the SNAP program:

1. Students with \$0 Expected Family Contribution as determined on the FAFSA, representing financial aid recipients with the highest level of financial need.
2. Students with any dependents under the age of 18, which aligns the parenting exemption with that for other SNAP recipients.
3. Students who are enrolled in another means-tested benefit or who have an immediate family member enrolled in another means-tested benefit, similar to the treatment of federal financial aid applicants exempt from asset reporting.
4. Undergraduate students who are considered independent for the purposes of federal student aid, including veterans, active-duty military personnel, students with a history in the foster care system, and students experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Offering simplified pathways will make eligibility criteria clearer and more understandable for students most likely to experience food insecurity, while making it easier for states and schools to verify eligibility and administer the benefit. At the same time, balancing cost concerns with the needs of today's students, these proposed exemptions are designed to not expand eligibility to students with sufficient access to family income or wealth.

Today's college students are balancing needs beyond the classroom, supporting families, and experiencing food insecurity. Thirty-nine percent of today's college students come from low-income backgrounds, and 51% are financially independent. Further, 51% of college students face food insecurity, and 70% parenting college students report basic needs insecurities. Too many of today's students have to make untenable choices between their basic needs like food and other living expenses or covering tuition and textbooks.

Offering additional pathways to qualifying for SNAP that leverage pre-verified data, such as from a student's FAFSA, can make the rules simpler for students most likely to experience food insecurity to understand, and for colleges and states to outreach to students and administer the benefit. As a result, college students will increase their chances of ultimately achieving a degree or other credential at a time when postsecondary education is needed more than ever to succeed in the labor market.

By enacting the above recommendations, Congress will make a significant difference in helping a larger number of today's students stay in school and become strong contributors to the American workforce.

We thank you for your commitment to today's students and look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,

Benefits Data Trust
Center for Higher Education Policy and Practice at Southern New Hampshire University
Higher Learning Advocates
National College Attainment Network
uAspire
Achieving the Dream
AdvanceEDU
Advance Vermont
Alabama Possible
American Federation of Teachers
Bottom Line
Breakthrough Central Texas
Campaign for College Opportunity
Center for First-generation Student Success
Charter Oak State College
College Now Greater Cleveland
College Possible
College Together
Council for Adult Learners and Experiential Learning (CAEL)
Da Vinci Schools
Detroit Regional Dollars for Scholars
Duet
Generation Hope
GraduLet
Inside Track
Jobs for the Future (JFF)
John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY)
Latino U College Access (LUCA)
LeadMN
Let's Get Ready, Inc.
Michigan College Access Network
More than Bootstraps
NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Skills Coalition
Noble Schools
PelotonU
SchoolHouse Connection
Southern California College Attainment Network

Student Veterans of America
The Education Trust
The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
The Institute for College Access and Success
Trio New College Network
University of Maryland Global Campus
University and Professional Continuing Education Association (UPCEA)
USC Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice
Western Governors University
Yes We Must Coalition