

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 12, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Vice President Kamala D. Harris
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris,

Thank you for your powerful message, stating that the hunger crisis is unacceptable. Led by our duty to each other and guided by the need to reinvigorate our economy, we must address the hunger crisis. As you create your first Budget and comprehensive pandemic response, we urge you to include maximum funding levels for the federal nutrition safety net programs that are proven to help mitigate the depth and duration of food hardship, support economic recovery, and are our best tools to end hunger in America.

Even prior to COVID-19, food insecurity had been a serious problem in our nation, affecting every community -- rural, urban and suburban. The more than 35 million people who were food insecure in 2019 included children, older adults, people with disabilities, families working their way up the economic ladder, college students, veterans and active military families, immigrants, indigenous people, LGBTQ individuals, natural disaster survivors, and many others.

Over the last year, overall hunger has worsened and longstanding racial disparities have been deepened. As of December 2020, food insecurity among White households with children was 24.2 percent, while 38.6 percent of Latinx and 40.6 percent of African-American households with children suffered from food insecurity.¹ Adults who identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or as multiracial, were twice as likely as white adults to report that their household did not get enough to eat.² While official national data for Native American households is lacking, previous research in Washington State showed food insecurity among Native households was 2.5 times higher than in White households.³ COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated these racial inequities.

¹ Schanzenbach, D. and Tomeh N. Visualizing State Food Insecurity. Northwestern University Institute of Policy Research Analysis of Census Household Pulse Survey. <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/state-food-insecurity.html>.

² Center on Budget & Policy Priorities Analysis of Census Household Pulse Survey. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-recessions-effects-on-food-housing-and>

³ Food Insecurity and Hunger. Washington State Department of Health. DOH Pub. No. 160-015-March 2018. <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/160-015-MCHDataRptFoodInsecHunger.pdf>.

We applaud the actions you have taken already and urge your first Budget and overall pandemic response to reflect the scale of this crisis. We therefore call upon you and your Administration to seek maximum funding levels for the nation's nutrition safety net.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the nation's first line of defense against hunger. SNAP is especially vital for vulnerable populations. More than 85 percent of all SNAP benefits go to households with children, seniors, and persons with disabilities.⁴ SNAP has a proven record of effectiveness in promoting food security and health as well as in providing economic stimulus.⁵ Each \$1 in SNAP benefits during a downturn generates between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity.⁶ We applaud your plan's commitment to improve SNAP benefit adequacy as a core tenet.

We urge your budget to include funding to fully implement the necessary actions outlined in your American Rescue Plan⁷ and your Executive Order, to extend the 15 percent benefit increase as long as economic conditions require while avoiding a harmful benefits cliff,⁸ provide Emergency Allotments to the lowest-income SNAP households, address the core inadequacy of SNAP benefits by moving to the Low Cost Food Plan, fully support states to administer this critical program through the crisis, and connect more eligible people with benefits. We further applaud your call that "all Americans, regardless of background"⁹ have equitable access to SNAP. We urge you to support funding and an authorization for Puerto Rico and other territories to participate fully in SNAP, under the territories' leadership. We urge you to use your budget to make SNAP a more just, inclusive program to fight hunger and improve local economies in every community.

Child Nutrition Programs

No child in America should go hungry, and yet households with children face hunger at astonishing rates. The pandemic resulted in the US Department of Agriculture issuing waivers, allowing all students to receive free meals, as well as the incredibly successful Pandemic EBT program. We have the tools to end child hunger and owe it to our children to create that hunger-free future.

National School Lunch & Breakfast Programs

School meals have been a lifeline for families, with nutrition service departments and their crucial workforce providing and delivering "grab-and-go" meals across the country

⁴ *Facts SNAP Strengths*. Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). 2020.

⁵ *Initiatives to Make SNAP Benefits More Adequate Significantly Improve Food Security, Nutrition, and Health*. Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). February 2019. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snap-initiatives-to-make-snap-benefits-more-adequate.pdf>

⁶ "[Economic Linkages: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) Linkages with the General Economy](#)." USDA Economic Research Service. August 20, 2019.

⁷ President-elect Biden Announces American Rescue Plan. https://buildbackbetter.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/COVID_Relief-Package-Fact-Sheet.pdf.

⁸ See, for example: THE HUNGER CLIFF ONE YEAR LATER: 56 million meals lost Need for emergency food remains high. Food Bank for New York City. October 23, 2013. http://1giggs400j4830k22r3m4wqg-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/HungerCliff_ResearchBrief.pdf.

⁹ White House. President Biden's New Executive Actions Deliver Economic Relief for American Families and Businesses Amid the COVID-19 Crises. January 22, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/01/22/fact-sheet-president-bidens-new-executive-actions-deliver-economic-relief-for-american-families-and-businesses-amid-the-covid-19-crises/>.

even when campuses are closed due to COVID-19 to ensure that any child can receive a meal. A growing body of evidence¹⁰ demonstrates that universal school meals improves an array of outcomes, from preventing school lunch debt and shaming, to boosting students' health, attendance, and achievement. We urge your budget to continue these vital waivers that provide much needed stability for our youth, and build upon successful existing provisions to provide universal school meal access once the crisis subsides.

Pandemic EBT

P-EBT has been a shining success that government can swiftly act and improve the lives of Americans in need. Every state, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have embraced this new program to provide emergency EBT food benefits to children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, while school campuses are closed. The program is a stunning success, reducing child hunger by more than 30 percent.¹¹ We applaud your action to boost P-EBT benefits to better reflect the cost families face to feed their children. The experience of struggling families who face barriers to accessing school meals over the summer is very similar to the challenges families have faced during the pandemic: food insecurity increases, children are more likely to gain weight, and learning loss disproportionately impacts low-income children. We urge you to provide maximum funding to extend this vital program, and take steps to build on it, and the equally successful Summer EBT,¹² to permanently provide EBT during school closures when child hunger is proven to spike.¹³

Summer and Afterschool Meal Programs

Children are missing out on more than just meals during COVID-19: research shows that education inequities are growing, and that learning loss is expected to be greatest among low-income, Black and Latinx students.¹⁴ Summer and afterschool programs combined with summer and afterschool meals will be important supports to help counter the educational impact caused by the pandemic. Schools and community organizations are eligible for waivers to allow them to serve all children through the Summer Food Service Program during the pandemic. We ask that you continue to waive the area eligibility requirements for these programs.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC)

We support your call to improve WIC through important program modernizations, and to ensure that all mothers and young children receive the food, breastfeeding support, and other services they need.

¹⁰ Food Research & Action Center. School Meals are Essential for Health and Learning. August 2019. https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning_FNL.pdf.

¹¹ Bauer, L. The Effect of Pandemic EBT on Measures of Food Hardship. The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institute. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/P-EBT_LO_7.30.pdf.

¹² USDA. Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Summary Report. May 2016 <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/sebtfinalreport.pdf>.

¹³ Food Research & Action Center. Hunger Doesn't Take a Summer Vacation. August 2020. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/FRAC-Summer-Nutrition-Report-2020.pdf>.

¹⁴ McKinsey & Company. (2020). COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime>. Accessed on February 3, 2021.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Child care facilities across the country remain closed or operate under reduced hours, with many facing closure at the moment when child care is needed to enable economic recovery. We ask your budget to provide emergency funding to support CACFP, which provides reimbursement for meals and snacks in child care and afterschool programs.

Nutrition Programs Serving Older Adults

Low-income older adults remain on the front lines of COVID, in the twin bind of needing to safely shelter in place while facing the higher costs of home delivery of food, PPE, and other basic supplies. We must support the health and well-being of older adults and urge you to provide maximum funding levels for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program and Older Americans Act senior nutrition programs, while incorporating flexibilities so nutrition programs are able to safely and effectively serve seniors who must shelter in place.

Nutrition Programs Serving Native Americans

We urge additional investments to address the food insecurity crisis in Indian Country, including through food sovereignty initiatives. Moreover, individuals eligible for SNAP and The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) should be allowed to participate in both.

Address Food Insecurity Among Military Families

For far too long, even before the pandemic, the painful reality of food insecurity among active duty military families has been overlooked. We urge you to support the inclusion of the Military Family Basic Needs Allowance in the FY22 NDAA bill and include funding for this provision in the Department of Defense budget request. Additionally, support for greater coordination and collaboration between USDA and VA to facilitate SNAP outreach and enrollment for veterans will help to close the significant veteran SNAP participation gap.

Emergency Food

The lines at food banks remain long, with the Great Recession of 2008-2009 demonstrating that elevated demand will last for years, not months.¹⁵ We urge your budget to provide significant investments in food purchases through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to help food banks meet emergency need in communities across the country, as well as a robust investment in the infrastructure of our nation's charitable food system to allow food banks and partner distribution organizations to better serve their communities.

We again applaud your commitment to fighting hunger and ask you to utilize all of our nation's tools to respond to and build back better from the combined health and economic crises facing our nation. We look forward to working with you and your Administration to enact these into law and provide the relief urgently needed by the American people.

Sincerely,

¹⁵ Feeding America. Food Insecurity & Poverty Rates Improve to Pre-Recession Levels Yet 1 in 9 People at Risk of Hunger. 2018. <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/2019/10/food-insecurity-poverty-rates-improve-pre-recession-levels-2018-1-9-people-still-risk-hunger/>



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Theodore E. Deutch
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Michael F.Q. San Nicolas
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress

Al Lawson
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress

Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress

Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

Ed Case
Member of Congress

Elaine G. Luria
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Angie Craig
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress