

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20510

April 9, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

As you consider additional legislative priorities related to COVID-19, we urge you to address the growing food insecurity crisis by providing critical investments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP plays an essential role in the battle against hunger for nearly 2 million individuals in Pennsylvania, including seniors, children and individuals with disabilities. SNAP is one of the most vital social safety nets for Pennsylvanians and Americans across the country, and it must continue to play a critical role in reducing hunger and poverty throughout the COVID-19 health crisis.

In order to address this need and the ongoing food security and economic crisis, we urge you to incorporate provisions that will: (1) boost the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent; (2) increase the monthly minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30; (3) place a hold on harmful rules that weaken SNAP eligibility and benefits; and (4) provide additional options and investments to support delivery for SNAP participants.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak began, Pennsylvania has been following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to close non-essential businesses and adhere to social distancing and stay at home orders. These steps are absolutely necessary to protect public health, but as a result, industries have been significantly interrupted and many Pennsylvanians are now facing new or growing financial insecurity.

In early 2020, SNAP helped feed 1.7 million people across Pennsylvania, but that number is expected to increase in the coming weeks and months. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, more than 1.2 million people applied for unemployment benefits as a result of the pandemic. Our foodbanks have already seen a rapid increase in demand from customers who are in need of additional food assistance.

The average SNAP benefits provided in Pennsylvania comes to only \$1.31 per meal, or \$129 per month, and we know that many families are forced to use up their entire benefit early in the month. In order to mitigate the continued economic disruptions that we know the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to bring, it is essential that we increase the maximum benefits by at least 15 percent. This increase would not only benefit SNAP participants, but also boost the economy, as the increased spending is multiplied throughout the economy as the individuals and businesses supplying, transporting, and marketing the food also stand to benefit with increased income, thus extending economic benefits well beyond the initial support provided to SNAP participants.

Additionally, we must increase the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30, which will go a long way in helping Pennsylvanians, especially seniors and individuals with disabilities, keep food on the table.

As we work to support families during this time of crisis, we must put a stop to harmful rules that will weaken SNAP eligibility and benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2019, October 2019, and December 2019 respectively, the Trump Administration published three rules that if enacted, will: (1) severely limit broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE) and effectively throw hundreds of thousands of children off of school meal participation; (2) strip states of their much needed flexibility to set their own Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) using state-based and current energy cost information; and (3) eliminate state flexibility to waive certain work requirements and exemptions for SNAP participants who are able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs). The BBCE and ABAWDs rules circumvent congressional intent as laid-out in the 2018 Farm Bill and short of rescinding them, all three rules, at the very least should be stayed until the economy shows significant improvement.

Finally, we must ensure that food can be delivered to SNAP participants who cannot safely leave their home to travel to a store. This is especially important for seniors, immunocompromised individuals, families who lack reliable transportation and individuals with disabilities. These individuals in Pennsylvania and across the country should not be disadvantaged simply because they rely on SNAP benefits for access to healthy food. Congress should provide authority and funding to ensure that delivery options are available to SNAP participants.

We thank you for your consideration and close attention to these priorities that are necessary to address growing food insecurity in Pennsylvania and across the country during this time.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Mike Doyle  
Member of Congress

/s/ Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress

/s/ Susan Wild  
Member of Congress

/s/ Matthew A. Cartwright  
Member of Congress

/s/ Mary Gay Scanlon  
Member of Congress

/s/ Conor Lamb  
Member of Congress

/s/ Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress

/s/ Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress

/s/ Brendan Boyle  
Member of Congress

/s/ Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress