

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  
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