

June 20, 2018

**Re: Continued Opposition to the House Farm Bill (H.R. 2)**

Dear member of Congress:

**On behalf of the undersigned organizations, and the women, children, and families we represent across the state of Ohio, we are writing to express our continued opposition to the House Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R. 2) – also known as the House Farm Bill.** Our organizations are dedicated to fostering a policy landscape that creates economically secure, healthy, and thriving women and families. The drastic changes being proposed in H.R. 2 to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) would work against those shared goals and hurt the communities we serve.

When the House failed to pass this bill in May, it became even more clear that this harmful, partisan plan must be abandoned. The upcoming re-vote on this bill could undo decades of bipartisan commitments to SNAP and feeding struggling American families. Ahead of the second vote, we urge you to stand with Ohio’s women and families by opposing the legislation.

**More than 1.4 million Ohioans in nearly 700,000 households rely on federal food assistance.** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation’s most effective anti-hunger program. But H.R. 2 would cut food aid by more than \$17 billion over 10 years and change SNAP in ways that would threaten the economic and physical security of women and families.<sup>1</sup>

**H.R. 2 would impose harsher, unforgiving, and burdensome requirements to SNAP, which would cause many to lose access to program – taking food away from working families and making it more difficult to find work.** SNAP already requires participants to register for work and accept a position if offered, with certain exemptions.<sup>2</sup> Able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) under age 50 face special work requirements, and can only receive benefits for three months out of every three years unless they are working 20 hours per week.

But the House Farm Bill would make these requirements even tougher, creating unnecessary hurdles for retaining access to SNAP. The legislation would add additional requirements, such as mandating work for all ABAWDs under age 60, requiring participants to prove every month that they worked for 20 hours per week or qualified for an exemption, and increasing the work requirement to 25 hours per week beginning in 2026.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Policy Matters Ohio, “Farm Bill would slash funding for food aid: Tell your Reps. Hands off!” May 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.policymattersohio.org/blog/2018/05/08/farm-bill-would-slash-funding-for-food-aid-tell-your-rep-hands-off>.

<sup>2</sup> Urban Institute, “Work Requirements in Social Safety Net Programs.” 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/95566/work-requirements-in-social-safety-net-programs.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The Atlantic, “A Republican Plan Could Worsen Rural America’s Food Crisis.” May 2, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/05/the-future-hardships-of-rural-america/559343/>.

**SNAP is especially critical for women, who make up 63 percent of adult program recipients, and the stricter requirements would be particularly harmful for women and their families who depend on the program to make ends meet.** Women are more likely to hold low-wage, part-time and informal jobs.<sup>4</sup> The unpredictable nature of these jobs means that women would face systemic barriers to meeting the so-called work requirements and would, therefore, be at greater risk of losing vital food assistance. Women are the majority of caregivers—and the low-wage jobs in which they are concentrated usually offer minimal workplace flexibility to fulfill caregiving responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Imposing harsher work requirements would exacerbate the conflict between providing care and securing material needs that too many women already face. And no matter where women are forced to sacrifice, their families suffer.

Additionally, while SNAP currently exempts parents with children under age six from the general work requirement, two-thirds of children receiving SNAP benefits are school-aged and parents still need to arrange care for older children after school, during vacations, and when they need medical attention. Therefore, this exemption is insufficient to mitigate harmful changes in the pending legislation.

**The House Farm Bill would require single parents to participate in the federal child support enforcement program.** Currently, states can choose whether SNAP recipients must participate in this enforcement program, and only a few have mandated it. Adopting this requirement at the national level would prevent women from making their own decisions about their own safety and that of their families.<sup>6</sup> Single parents, who are most often mothers, may have good reasons for deciding not to engage with child support enforcement officials: they may wish to avoid jeopardizing relationships with the noncustodial parent, or incurring risk if there is a history of domestic violence. No single parent should feel compelled to choose between food assistance and physical security.

**H.R. 2 is a wasteful and partisan bill, which would only make it more difficult for families to succeed.** This legislation abandons the bi-partisan history of SNAP, and instead, imposes wasteful provisions that weaken the program and misses an opportunity to move forward meaningful investments in job training and education programs. The Farm Bill would waste taxpayer money on a bureaucratic system to track and operate the imposed changes to SNAP.

Further, it ignores the numerous studies and evidence demonstrating that so-called work requirements enforced in other safety net programs have not been effective in helping people maintain long-term employment. These studies find that any increases in employment seeming to follow from work requirements were relatively small and tended to fade over time, and that they have failed to substantially reduce poverty among safety net participants. In fact, when new or harsher requirements were added, most participants remained in poverty and some even become

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<sup>4</sup> The National Women's Law Center, "Low-Wage Workers Are Women: Three Truths and a Few Misconceptions." August 31, 2017. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/blog/low-wage-workers-are-women-three-truths-and-a-few-misconceptions/>.

<sup>5</sup> Family Caregivers Alliance, "Women and Caregiving: Facts and Figures." December 31, 2003. Retrieved from <https://www.caregiver.org/women-and-caregiving-facts-and-figures>.

<sup>6</sup> The National Women's Law Center, "The House Farm Bill: What's At Stake for Parents and Children." May 7, 2018. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/blog/the-house-farm-bill-whats-at-stake-for-parents-and-children/>.

poorer. The bottom line is that work requirements hurt more than they help. Adding bureaucratic barriers to accessing SNAP is the wrong strategy to promote healthy communities.

**What's more, this deeply flawed bill is now even worse due to amendments added in the first vote.** The House adopted an amendment that would make it harder for states to get certain waivers for work requirements, including waivers for high-unemployment areas and for the harsher new requirements mandated by the legislation. The House also adopted amendments that would cut the bill's funding for job training programs, allow states to privatize SNAP operations, and deny food assistance to people who are re-integrating into society after incarceration for certain convictions. All told, these and other changes increased the bill's SNAP benefit cut by \$4.9 billion—and women and their families would feel this burden most acutely.<sup>7</sup>

**H.R. 2 is bad for women, and the consequences don't stop there.** The proposed changes to SNAP would make too many women face harmful trade-offs in order to meet a basic human need: having enough to eat. And when women face impossible decisions, the livelihood of their families and the strength of our state economy hang in the balance.

We, the undersigned organizations, represent the interests of women and families in communities across Ohio. We are united by a deep commitment to our state and by a vision for Ohio wherein all families are able to lead secure and healthy lives. The House Farm Bill would cause devastating and long-term harm for women, families, and the economy—and Ohioans deserve better. **Again, we strongly urge you to vote NO on H.R. 2.**

Sincerely,

ACTION OHIO

Children's Defense Fund - Ohio

Innovation Ohio Education Fund

Ohio Domestic Violence Network

Ohio NOW

The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network

ProgressOhio

Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio

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<sup>7</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "House Farm Bill, Which May Face Another Vote, Even Worse Due to Recent Amendments." May 18, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/house-farm-bill-which-may-face-another-vote-even-worse-due-to-recent-amendments>.