

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

We, the undersigned national organizations, write to oppose H.R. 2, the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018, and urge you to vote no on this bill. Collectively, we represent the interests of the classified school employees, school food service workers, paraprofessionals, teachers, principals and school leaders in elementary and secondary schools who provide nutritious meals to students in and out of school; we also advocate for undergraduate and graduate students struggling with food insecurity. In our lives and in our work, we see the benefits of the existing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which acts as a lifeline to support 40 million low-income Americans, who without such assistance would suffer from hunger. H.R. 2 would change the nature of SNAP by loading on impractical work requirements for many who currently access food assistance.

Approximately 40 million Americans use SNAP to help pay for their groceries. Several provisions in H.R. 2 would change SNAP eligibility and directly impact access to free and reduced-price meals in schools. H.R. 2 makes broad changes to categorical eligibility that could cause working families to abruptly lose food assistance if their income or savings hits a certain amount, or if their work hours are increased. Under the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, Congress required all school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program to directly certify their students in SNAP households for free school meals. If families lose SNAP benefits, students would no longer be eligible for free school meals. It is estimated that the changes to SNAP in H.R. 2 would cause 265,000 students to lose assistance for meals at school. This will especially impact the 28 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which previously expanded eligibility. As the percentage of student eligibility for free and reduced-price meals changes, it will have an impact on the more than 9.7 million students in 20,721 schools and 3,538 school districts that are participating in the Community Eligibility Provision, which gives all students access to breakfast and lunch at no charge each school day. Research shows that SNAP's impact on children lasts a lifetime: They are more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to suffer long-term health problems; and they have lower overall healthcare costs.

There currently is a three-month time limit that cuts off food assistance to any adult without children who is in need and is unable to find a reliable 20-hour-a-week job. Now, H.R. 2 would expand such restrictions to all adults (ages 18-59) who are not disabled, pregnant, or caring for a child under the age of 6. This restriction would have a direct effect on parents of school-age children. It also particularly would affect undergraduate students and graduate employees at institutions of higher education. As the cost of college increases, more undergraduate students go hungry. In 2016, approximately 48 percent of undergraduate students skipped meals and reported themselves as "food insecure." Food insecurity among college students affected students in two-year and four-year programs similarly, but had a greater impact on students of color. Considering that about 60 percent of undergraduate students work part time and 26 percent are parents, denying SNAP benefits would only impede their progress and ability to work toward a better future. Currently, 18 percent of undergraduate students are eligible for SNAP, but only 3 percent receive benefits. Because graduate employees are considered students with only part-time employment, this limit bars them from utilizing SNAP. Congress should do better and improve the assistance to our undergraduate and graduate students.

H.R. 2 means more children will go hungry at home as well as at school. H.R. 2 means undergraduate and graduate students will continue to struggle with food insecurity and poverty. We collectively urge you to vote no on H.R. 2.