



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

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House Farm Bill Will Make Millions Hungrier

Statement by Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director

By a very slim 2-vote margin, House members voted today to deny food assistance to 2 million people in 1 million households. The farm bill as passed by the House is painfully ignorant of the realities of low-wage work, and will make it harder for low-income working people to make ends meet. Workers in jobs with unpredictable and inadequate hours will be judged to have failed to meet the new “work requirements.” They will become ineligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for at least a year. Parents with sick children, people with disabilities, and older workers are all likely to run afoul of these new barriers, and everyone in their families will suffer. Parents with children as young as six must participate or lose food, with no assurance of child care. In addition, the bill would end policies that allow partial benefits to workers who gain a little more income – making worse the “cliff” that Speaker Ryan and others have cited as providing a disincentive to work. People work when they can, but this provision will reduce their income. Denying food to families in need is in appalling contrast to Congress’ enactment of tax cuts overwhelmingly benefiting the wealthy at a cost of nearly \$2 trillion. These are the wrong priorities, to say the least.

This bill abandons the pilot employment and training programs operating in a number of states before their evaluations could be completed. Instead, the bill takes funds away from benefits, largely spending them on bureaucratic enforcement, and commits an inadequate amount towards training. Workers losing their SNAP benefits will find work more difficult to sustain, as they have less income to cover car repairs, rising gas prices, or public transit. Health and housing problems may worsen, making work more difficult. Amendments added to the bill would impose lifetime bans on assistance for certain felons, despite their having served their full sentences. Denying them this modest benefit will make it much harder for them to make the transition back to the community. Such a ban runs counter to the attempts to provide rehabilitation for those who have been incarcerated for opioid and other illegal drug offenses.

The Senate Agriculture Committee has drafted a farm bill that protects SNAP, with broad bipartisan support. That bill, and not the punitive House version, should be the approach Congress adopts.

The Coalition on Human Needs is made up of more than 100 national organizations including faith groups, service providers, policy experts, labor, civil rights and other advocates concerned with meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable people.