

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Hart SOB, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Hart SOB, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
RHOB, Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
RHOB, Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2018

Dear Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson:

We are writing regarding the conference committee deliberations on the farm bill, a critical piece of legislation that will directly affect the nutrition of nearly four million Texans receiving SNAP.

Our organizations serve and represent many of these Texans. We are among the largest private, faith-based and community nonprofits in Texas, and our collective work constitutes a significant portion of our state's social safety net.

The Texans we serve each day are hardworking people who dream of better lives for themselves and their families. When they are not prevented by age or disability, they are willing to work long hours, suffer low wages, and juggle child care with long commutes and capricious schedules to achieve this dream. Their circumstances may be different than yours or ours, but they are still our neighbors — our fellow Texans.

These neighbors bag our groceries, care for our children, and keep the gears of our economy moving, yet still struggle to pay their own bills. They routinely face agonizing choices — such as whether to buy food or pay the utility bill. Many of them turn to charities like ours, and to wage supports like SNAP to ensure their children have enough to eat.

These Texans are not struggling because they *choose* not to work, or don't work hard enough. They are falling behind because low-wage work does not provide them with enough economic stability to care for their families and remain productive members of our workforce.

Regrettably, an understanding of the lives of these Texans — and their true circumstances — is nearly absent from the current debate. Instead, we see a dispute over how many more bureaucratic hoops struggling families ought to endure. This debate does not appear to be well informed about the high rates of employment in SNAP households, or the current SNAP work requirements.

In Texas, SNAP already requires many adults to log targeted numbers of hours worked or searching for work each month. We already impose harsh sanctions on those who fail to comply, yet provide only minimal access to services that would remove their employment barriers or give them the skills they need

to get ahead. States already have considerable flexibility to tailor these rules or invest their own dollars in meaningful employment and training, but Texas has rarely seized either opportunity.

The current underfunded, cookie-cutter approach to work requirements has not helped these Texans feed their children or find stable employment. This approach undermines family stability and makes it harder to achieve job security. We urge the farm bill conference committee to interpret Texas' story as a cautionary tale: expanding such a bureaucracy and the harsh punishments that prop it up would be a mistake for America.

As you confer with each other and your colleagues in the coming weeks, we hope that your debate – and ultimate decisions – will reflect a truer experience of food insecurity in America.

The truth is that nobody wants to rely on others to eat. **That's why the [research clearly shows](#) that most SNAP households with an able-bodied adult are employed during or within a year of their participation, although low wages and volatile hours may still leave them eligible for help.**

The truth is that SNAP is not a "lifestyle" – if it is a club, it is one that most participants hope to leave as soon as possible. Threatening to take food off their tables won't motivate them further, though it will make them fear for their children's futures.

The truth is that [two thirds of Americans](#) oppose cutting SNAP. They understand that taking food away from some families in order to fund unproven employment approaches for others doesn't reflect our compassion for our neighbors and isn't good public policy.

In the coming weeks, we trust that you will work wisely and in a bipartisan fashion to pass a farm bill that is helpful, and not harmful to all Americans.

We also hope to see in your debate a greater respect for how families across this country are already struggling hard to put food on the table, and an agreement that we should not increase their burdens.

Signed,

Feeding Texas

The Center for Public Policy Priorities

The Christian Life Commission

Texas State Association of YMCAs

Meals on Wheels Association of Texas

National Association of Social Workers / Texas Chapter

Texans Care for Children

Children's Defense Fund - Texas

Children at Risk

Texas Impact

Cc: The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Filemon Vela, Jodey Arrington and Jeb Hensarling