



June 13, 2018

Office of Rep. Mike Conaway  
2430 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Conaway;

We write to express our grave concerns over the provision in H.R.2 that would allow States to outsource the administration of core SNAP eligibility functions to private companies. We believe that privatization of eligibility or benefit decisions would harm the vulnerable Americans who rely on SNAP, compromise the integrity of the program, and waste taxpayer dollars.

Texas food banks have decades of experience helping needy Texans navigate the SNAP application process. We know first-hand the challenges our clients face, particularly the elderly, in enrolling in the program. Because SNAP is a highly targeted benefit, the eligibility determination process is time-consuming and complex. As such, it requires qualified, professional civil service workers to ensure timely eligibility decisions and accurate benefit issuances. While it may be appropriate to outsource certain discrete functions (such as IT or benefit issuance systems) to private contractors, decisions over who is eligible, or how much assistance to provide must remain with civil service employees. When these functions are turned over to for-profit companies, experience has shown they are likely to focus more on their bottom line than on ensuring that needy people get the help they deserve.

Our food banks bore witness to Texas' disastrous experience with privatization in 2005, when thousands of eligible applicants were forced to wait months to enroll, given misinformation, or wrongly denied assistance. In one highly publicized case, private client data were inappropriately shared, compromising their privacy and security. Texas' experiment ultimately resulted in the termination of the contract, a federal lawsuit and the loss of two-thirds of the state workforce. And while the private companies pledged millions in cost-savings and other benefits, none of those promises were realized. It took years to recover, and cost taxpayers in the long-run.

As the backlogs grew longer, Feeding Texas offered its assistance, leading to a carefully designed and monitored project that tested the feasibility of training food banks to assist in the SNAP enrollment process. This effort was the genesis for Texas' Community Partner Program, a successful public-private partnership that enlists the help of hundreds of non-profits today. The reason this partnership is effective, however, is because the State has retained the responsibility for the core functions related to the SNAP eligibility determination process.

Congress should learn from Texas' failed privatization experiment and reject attempts in the Farm Bill to allow privatization of core SNAP functions, like determining eligibility. Members of the Texas delegation have a unique opportunity to educate their colleagues about the shortfalls of such an approach. We hope that you will work with your colleagues to maintain the integrity of the SNAP program by ensuring that the SNAP workforce is focused on meeting community needs, rather than enriching company profits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "cmcole".

Celia Cole  
Chief Executive Officer

*Feeding Texas leads a unified effort for a hunger-free Texas. Visit us at [www.feedingtexas.org](http://www.feedingtexas.org)*