

Coalition on Human Needs: House Farm Bill is a cruel and inhumane blueprint for increasing hunger in America

CHN Executive Director Deborah Weinstein released the following statement on Tuesday, May 21:

“If the Farm Bill to be considered in the House Committee on Agriculture on May 23 becomes law, it will mean a cut of nearly \$30 billion in SNAP benefits over a decade.

“Such cuts are unconscionable. For many children, they will make learning more difficult and lead to negative health outcomes. They will force families to choose between putting food on the table and paying for other expenses such as rent, utility bills, or prescription drugs. They will also harm our economy, removing the stimulative benefits of SNAP and even hurting farmers and ranchers along the way.

“What is particularly worrisome is the proposal to limit the USDA’s ability to update the Thrifty Food Plan to reflect the real costs of a nutritious diet, based on science, along with reflecting food prices that remain stubbornly high. This will make it tougher for families experiencing food insecurity as well as the food banks that aid them. These would be the largest cuts to SNAP benefits in almost 30 years if enacted, and families across the country would face more and more challenges putting food on the table over time.

“In addition to reducing future SNAP benefits, the cuts to the Thrifty Food Plan proposed in House Agriculture Committee Chair Thompson’s bill would lead to more than \$500 million in cuts to Summer EBT, which provides grocery benefits to children in low-income families during the summer when schools are closed, along with \$100 million in cuts to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which provides food for food banks and food pantries to distribute to individuals and families. It is a serious disappointment that the Thompson proposal fails to start the process of transitioning Puerto Rico into the full SNAP program; even worse, 70 percent of the bill’s increase to Puerto Rico’s block grant funding would be wiped out by the future cuts to the Thrifty Food Plan, a loss of \$700 million.

“We strongly oppose the bill’s provision to allow states to abandon merit-based civil service staffing by privatizing eligibility determination for SNAP. When tried in SNAP and in other programs, outsourcing staffing did not lead to greater efficiencies but did result in private profit incentives coming before accurate and timely decisions about benefits.

“CHN also opposes the bill’s dismantling of guardrails included in the Inflation Reduction Act to ensure investment in the most effective climate-saving and conservation practices, intended to counter the large increases otherwise projected in agriculture-caused

greenhouse gas emissions. Such a backwards step will affect the health and economic security of all Americans, disproportionately people with low incomes and people of color, and including farmers themselves.

“While the House Farm Bill slices at some of the nation’s key nutrition assistance programs and makes the wholly unacceptable choice of diverting funds from nutrition assistance, there is thankfully a better way. Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) has released a framework of a Farm Bill that strengthens SNAP. It establishes a path for Puerto Rico to eventually participate in the program. Like the House proposal, it restores eligibility for people convicted of a drug-related felony. It reduces barriers to SNAP participation for older adults, military families, and some college students. It addresses farmworker safety and safeguards the workforce that helps SNAP participants enroll in or renew their benefits to protect program integrity. Unlike the House bill, the Senate plan makes needed improvements without cutting benefits.

“There is plenty of evidence that adequate nutrition improves the health of young and old alike. The bill before the House Agriculture Committee makes a nearly \$30 billion cut in SNAP’s capacity to provide a healthy diet, and cuts other nutrition programs as well. The consequences in compromised health and development and higher medical costs are unacceptable. The Coalition on Human Needs strongly urges the House Committee on Agriculture to reject this bill.”

The Coalition on Human Needs (CHN) is an alliance of national organizations working together to promote public policies which address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations. The Coalition's members include civil rights, religious, labor and professional organizations, service providers, and those concerned with the well-being of children, women, the elderly, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities.