



November 13, 2023

Representative Barbara Lee
Representative Eric Swalwell
Representative Mark DeSaulnier
Representative Ro Khanna
Senator Alex Padilla
Senator Laphonza Butler

RE: Support a Comprehensive Farm Bill Package

Dear Alameda County Congressional Delegation Members:

Thank you for your leadership and support in sponsoring and co-sponsoring legislation that strengthens the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). First 5 Alameda County (First 5) urges Congress to **support a comprehensive Farm Bill package that includes the following changes in the proposed legislative package to protect, strengthen, and expand equitable access to the supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other anti-hunger programs.**

First 5 is guided by a “whole community, whole family, whole child” policy and programming approach that seeks to ensure that all children in Alameda County are ready for kindergarten by creating the conditions that position all for success. Findings from our [2021-22 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment](#), a participatory research project that surveyed over 3000 parents/caregivers, early care and education professionals, and TK and Kindergarten teachers in Alameda County, show that **family health & wellbeing and access to basic needs are associated with school readiness**. In [Alameda County](#):

- 3 out of 4 households struggling to meet their basic needs have a head of household that identifies as a person of color.
- 12,182 children ages 0-6 were enrolled in CalFresh/SNAP—11% of total children ages 0-6.
- 65% of parents reported needing free/affordable food & nutrition while only 31% reported receiving this support.
- \$109,910 is the gap between the income required to meet basic needs and the income of a family living at the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), with maximum 2021 tax credits.

For these reasons, First 5 requests that Congress incorporate the following policy changes into the next comprehensive Farm Bill package:

- 1) **Calibrate SNAP benefit amounts to a more realistic food plan proposed in the Closing the Meal Gap Act** (H.R. 3037 Adams / S. 1336 Gillibrand) which would substitute the USDA Low-Cost Food Plan for the Thrifty Food Plan as the basis for SNAP benefits. In addition, increase the minimum SNAP monthly benefit amount, which currently is only \$23; consider all of a household’s excess shelter costs in determining their SNAP benefits; and streamline states’ use of a Standard Medical Expense Deduction.
- 2) **End SNAP time limits as proposed in the Improving Access to Nutrition Act** (H.R. 1510 Lee and Adams / S. 2435 Welch) which would eliminate three-month time limits on SNAP eligibility for certain working-age adults who cannot document sufficient hours of work.



- 3) **Improve SNAP access for low-income college students in the Enhance Access to SNAP Act** (EATS Act H.R. 3183 Gomez / S. 1488 Gillibrand) which would drop the extra work requirements that full-time college students face in qualifying.
- 4) **Eliminate SNAP policies that disproportionately harm immigrant communities.** This includes, as proposed in the Lift the Bar Act (H.R. 4170 Jayapal / S. 2038 Hirono), removing the 5-year residency waiting period in SNAP that most documented immigrant adults face. Additional improvements would extend equitable SNAP access for tribal members and residents of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands as well as remove the bar to use of SNAP benefits for purchase of hot prepared foods.
- 5) **Permanently end the prohibition on use of SNAP benefits to purchase hot prepared foods from food retailers through the Hot Foods Act** (H.R. 3519 Meng / S. 2258 Bennet) would afford SNAP customers broader choices available to other food shoppers.
- 6) **Ensure end-to-end remote access to remote access to Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP).**
- 7) **Repeal the lifetime ban on individuals with a past felony drug conviction from receiving SNAP in the Making Essentials Accessible and Legal (MEAL) Act** (H.R. 3479 Cohen and Rutherford / S. 1753 Booker).
- 8) **Improve The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** so that food bank shoppers can access more nutritious, culturally responsive food with dignity, and make all TEFAP flexibilities permitted during the pandemic permanent. Raise the minimum income eligibility threshold for TEFAP to 250% in order to maximize participation by low-income populations and increase the authorization for TEFAP administrative grants for Storage and Distribution to \$400 million per year and \$15 million per year for TEFAP Infrastructure Grants.
- 9) **Increase access and enhance the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) so older adults can access more nutritious, culturally responsive food with dignity and expand to persons living with a disability by increasing the income guidelines.** Apply an automatic across-the-board medical deduction to the income of all CSFP applicants and create a pilot project to serve people living with disabilities through CSFP. Expand food bank commodities and product selection by including additional food options such as fresh or frozen alternatives.

We are grateful for your continued leadership and support for children, families, and communities and ask that that you **support a comprehensive Farm Bill package that protects, strengthens, and expands equitable access to SNAP and anti-hunger programs.** Please reach out to me at kristin.spanos@first5alameda.org if you have any questions or if we can help with additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kristin Spanos".

Kristin Spanos
Chief Executive Officer
First 5 Alameda County