



July 30, 2020

Dear Senators and Members of the House of Representatives:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) yesterday issued a misleading news release entitled: “SNAP Benefits to Increase in Fiscal Year 2021.” The release appears designed to create a misleading impression that USDA strengthened the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to respond to our hunger emergency.

In reality, it merely publicizes an annually mandated adjustment to SNAP benefit levels. In late July every year, USDA announces adjustments to the SNAP maximum benefit and deductions based on changes in the cost of living, including the cost of food. \* **The “increase” reflects a proven increase in costs, and thus is not an actual increase in the spending power from benefits.**

**Importantly, only Congress has the ability to truly strengthen the program, a step that 2,500 organizations across the country are [urging](#) lawmakers to take.** This necessary, real increase is missing from the current Senate proposal, meaning that Congress is missing a crucial opportunity to assist struggling families and boost the economy.

We urge that you act quickly to increase the SNAP benefit and suspend attempts to restrict access to the program. Such provisions were included in the House-passed [HEROES Act](#).

It is logical that USDA’s annual adjustment based on a reassessment of the cost of food has included a small increase in benefits for some – food prices have experienced the [largest spike in nearly 50 years](#) due to the pandemic.

Yet this adjustment means a small benefit increase for some and no benefit increase for others, and it does not adequately support the one in four households with children [struggling to keep adequate food on the table](#).

More importantly, SNAP benefits have long been vastly inadequate, averaging \$1.40 per person per meal in 2020. Benefit levels are based on [flawed assumptions](#) of what is needed to afford a nutritionally adequate diet. The Thrifty Food Plan assumes participants have the time and resources to buy and prepare cheap, raw ingredients and cook healthy meals from scratch, a reality that is not the case for many.

Furthermore, SNAP participants tend to lose purchasing power over the course of the fiscal year, as the annual adjustment that goes in to effect October 1 is based on food prices from three months prior and an updated adjustment doesn’t go in to effect until the following October.

Congress should not leave the Capitol without [including a true SNAP expansion in the next stimulus package](#). The House-passed HEROES Act [increases the maximum SNAP benefit](#) by 15 percent (an amount higher than the annual adjustment) and increases the minimum benefit level



from \$16 to \$30 (the adjustment does [not raise the minimum benefit at all](#)). The HEROES Act also suspends implementation of [administrative rules](#) that restrict SNAP for millions of people through onerous work requirements, income, asset and deduction standards.

The Senate waited 73 days after the House passed the HEROES Act to pass its bill, which fails to include any significant nutrition assistance. The failure to strengthen SNAP is inexplicable given that the Senate bill doubles the tax deduction for business meals. That is, corporate executives are ensured increased meal subsidies while [12 million SNAP participants have been excluded](#) from emergency benefit increases and [14 million children are hungry](#).

The USDA release boasts that this annually mandated adjustment will “help SNAP participants during this unprecedented crisis” and “complement the many actions USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service has taken to date to help American families put food on the table during the coronavirus pandemic,” but in reality, only Congress has the power to truly support hungry families.

We ask that you do so quickly.

Sincerely,

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\* Specifically, the adjustment is based on the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), an estimate of “how much it costs to [provide nutritious, low-cost meals for a household](#).”