



July 30, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
S-221 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
S-231 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
H-204 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Boehner:

In seeking ways to meet pay-as-you-go requirements for priority legislation, some have proposed cutting future benefits in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps). We urge you to reject efforts to cut funding for SNAP benefits. These funds should not be diverted for other purposes.

More than 40 million vulnerable Americans depend on SNAP. They have very low-incomes: in an average month in 2008, 87 percent of SNAP households had incomes at or below the federal poverty level, and nearly 41 percent had incomes at or below one half of the poverty line. Nearly half of all SNAP recipients were children. Nearly one in ten was age 60 or over.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) boosted SNAP benefit levels for these vulnerable people. The ARRA SNAP boosts were warranted when passed and continue to be vitally important now and in the future. The fact that the proposed SNAP cut would only harm children, seniors and others in the “out years” makes the damage of this unwarranted cut to desperately needy people no more acceptable.

First, SNAP benefits help low-income people struggling against hunger. In the last quarter of 2009, 18.5 percent of Americans reported to Gallup that there had been times in the prior 12 months when they did not have enough money to buy food that they or their family needed. Without the ARRA SNAP benefit boosts, this “food hardship” likely would be even worse.

Second, SNAP benefits are an important component of a strengthened and sustained economic recovery. Based on USDA research, it is estimated that each \$1 in federally-funded SNAP benefits generates \$1.84 in economic activity. Cutting back on the ARRA SNAP benefit levels would undermine the effectiveness of SNAP as a countercyclical tool.

Even with the ARRA boosts, SNAP benefits average less than \$4.50 per person per day. Rolling back the ARRA SNAP boosts would return millions of families to the situation where their SNAP/ benefits typically run out in the third or early in the fourth week of the month. It would increase hunger. It would increase obesity by making it even harder for struggling families to purchase healthy food.

There is important legislation pending to address the needs of millions of Americans who are struggling in this weak recovery, but it is unacceptable to pay for such benefits by raiding desperately needed SNAP dollars.

Now is not the time to roll back the fight against hunger.

Sincerely,

AARP

Food Research and Action Center

Voices for Americas Children