



## Fiscal Year 2018 Budget and Appropriations Priorities March 2017

Federal nutrition programs provide a critical safety net for millions of struggling households — including individuals of all ages — by helping them put food on the table during times of need. Investing in hunger prevention and relief also makes good fiscal sense. Hunger increases health care costs, lowers worker productivity, harms children’s development, and diminishes children’s educational performance. More than 42 million Americans are now living in households that are food insecure. Even as the economy strengthens, millions of families have been left behind in the economic recovery, causing the need for food assistance to remain high. Congress should maintain its historically bipartisan commitment to programs that provide food assistance to vulnerable low-income households by protecting the structure of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) — and the other nutrition safety net programs — and sufficiently funding them to address the problem of hunger in America.

### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

**The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, formerly known as Food Stamps, is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. It responds quickly and effectively to changes in need, whether due to economic downturns or natural disasters. As conditions improve, SNAP caseloads fall. In November 2016, SNAP helped put food on the table for 43 million people, over two million fewer people than the prior November. SNAP benefits are targeted at the most vulnerable: 82 percent of all SNAP benefits go to households with a child, senior, or person with disabilities; and the average SNAP household has an income of slightly less than 59 percent of the federal poverty line. Unfortunately, SNAP benefits are inadequate for most families to afford a healthy diet throughout the month: SNAP benefits average only \$1.39 per person per meal. Benefit inadequacy has serious consequences: research has linked diminished food budgets later in the month with a drop-off in caloric intake, lower school performance, and an increase in hospitalizations due to low blood sugar for low-income adults.

- Congress should protect SNAP from harmful policy proposals to alter its structure or cut its funding, which would undermine its efficacy. Instead, Congress should strengthen SNAP by basing SNAP benefit allotments on the low-cost food plan and ameliorating the harsh time limits on benefits for certain jobless adults who are willing to work, but are unable to find sufficient hours.

### **Child Nutrition Appropriations**

The **Child Nutrition Programs** play a critical role in helping children in low-income families achieve access to quality nutrition, child care, and education and enrichment activities, while improving their overall health, development, and school achievement.

- **School Meals:** Congress must maintain low-income children’s access to programs and preserve the improvements made in the school meals nutrition standards and the overall school nutrition environment.

Congress should continue to provide \$10 million for school meals direct certification grants to reduce paperwork for schools, and \$35 million in school equipment grants to enable school districts to build their capacity to prepare meals on-site that are healthier and more cost-effective to produce.

- **Summer Meals:** Congress should provide \$32 million to continue the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Demonstration Projects to ensure that children in rural and underserved areas have access to nutrition during the summer.
- **Child Care Meals:** Congress should provide \$25 million for Team Nutrition funding, which is the primary resource for promoting healthy eating and nutrition education in Child Nutrition Programs. These funds

could assist State Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) agencies and community-based sponsoring organizations successfully implement the new, healthier CACFP meal pattern and sustain CACFP as a support for working parents. Congress should continue to provide \$10 million to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for CACFP nutrition and wellness education and program efforts. These funds will be crucial to supporting USDA's important role in providing materials, training and support to State agencies and program operators to bolster nutrition knowledge among child care providers.

- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Congress should fund WIC at \$6.36 billion to serve anticipated caseloads, provide a \$150 million contingency fund, and carefully monitor WIC participation and food cost inflation to assure that the approved appropriation responds to economic conditions and meets anticipated needs. Included in the WIC appropriation should be set-asides that include WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counseling (\$90 million), infrastructure and technical assistance (\$14 million), and program research and evaluations (\$5 million).
- **WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP):** FMNP provides fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants and works to expand sales at farmers' markets. Congress should support the WIC FMNP at \$22 million.

### **Senior Nutrition Programs**

**Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP):** Seniors 60 years and older receive food packages designed to meet their special dietary needs. While the cost to USDA to provide each food package is about \$20 per month, the average retail value is \$50, making it a highly efficient use of federal dollars.

- Congress should provide \$250 million to maintain the current CSFP caseload of 697,865, and provide an opportunity for the two remaining states that are not yet operating CSFP to begin operations, subject to USDA-approved plans.

**Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs (SFMNP):** SFMNP provides low-income seniors with coupons that can be exchanged for eligible foods at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture programs.

- Congress should support SFMNP at \$21 million.

### **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**

**TEFAP Commodities:** Nutritious TEFAP foods are an essential resource for local emergency food providers, which combine government commodities with privately donated foods to maximize TEFAP benefits far beyond the budgeted amount for the program.

- Congress should provide \$329 million for TEFAP mandatory commodities, which includes the additional funding authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill. In addition, Congress should continue to provide funding for Section 32 so that USDA can provide market support through bonus commodities for TEFAP when prices are low. Funding caps on Section 32 result in less food for food banks.

**TEFAP Storage and Distribution Funds:** TEFAP Storage and Distribution Funds help cover costs associated with distributing TEFAP commodities to emergency food providers and help those food providers defray the costs of storing, transporting, and distributing TEFAP foods. On average, currently appropriated Storage and Distribution funds cover only about 24 percent of the costs of handling TEFAP commodities, forcing food banks to shift costs from other priority areas.

- Congress should appropriate the fully authorized amount of \$100 million for TEFAP Storage and Distribution Funds.

### **Congressional Hunger Center**

**Emerson/Leland Hunger Fellowship Program:** Since 1994, Congress has funded the Bill Emerson/Mickey Leland Hunger Fellowships, and by doing so, has enhanced the effectiveness of local, state, and national anti-hunger and anti-poverty groups, government agencies, and faith-based organizations by the research, analysis and policy work conducted by their Fellows.

- Congress should fully fund the Fellowship Program at \$2 million.