

An Open Letter to Governor Bruce Rauner

February 14, 2017

Dear Governor Rauner,

On behalf of the 139 undersigned Illinois organizations, we write to urge your resolve to protect and strengthen federal nutrition programs against any benefit cuts or changes in entitlement structure in 2017 and beyond. We hope that, in light of your recent decision to continue to allow over 250,000 Illinoisans to receive food assistance, you will champion federal nutrition programs in the current political climate.

Far too many people in this country are struggling with hunger – 42 million, including 13 million children. Many of these people turn to government and private charity programs to prevent hunger, but our local food pantries and congregate meal programs report they are already at capacity and will be unable to respond adequately to federal cuts.

Hunger is a year-round struggle for children, low-wage working families, seniors and persons with disabilities. Older adults and disabled residents face hunger when they must choose between paying for heat or food, or getting medical treatment. Low-wage working families need nutrition supports to make ends meet.

While the depth and breadth of hunger is vast, families in our communities would be much worse off if it were not for the nation's profoundly successful and cost-effective anti-hunger programs: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ([SNAP](#)), the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs ([NSLP](#)); the Child and Adult Care Food Program ([CACFP](#)) that provides nutrition in child care, adult care, afterschool snack and supper programs; Summer Food programs; The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant and Children ([WIC](#)); [Senior Nutrition Programs](#) (under the Older Americans Act); and the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program ([TEFAP](#)).

These national nutrition programs reduce hunger and poverty, improve health and learning, boost productivity, create jobs and economic growth, and strengthen our communities. These programs help seniors, children, people with disabilities, veterans and active duty military families, low-paid workers, unemployed and underemployed adults across Illinois—in rural, urban, and suburban areas.

Effective Federal Anti-Hunger Programs Have a Significant Impact on the Economy and Health Outcomes

Federal anti-hunger programs are essential, not only to prevent hunger and some of the worst outcomes of poverty, but also for communities and retailers who depend on low-income shoppers to buy nutritious food with benefits.

Slashing the anti-hunger safety net would be devastating for Illinois.

- It is in the best interest of Illinois to connect eligible households with SNAP and maximize the amount of federal dollars entering state and local economies. SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded and [for every \\$1 in SNAP benefits there is an economic return of \\$1.71](#). Program cuts and the loss of entitlement from restructuring SNAP would significantly impact jobs in the farming and retail industries in Illinois. Illinois already has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country.

- The impact of SNAP on health has been demonstrated as early as in utero; babies of expectant mothers who receive SNAP are up to [23% less likely to have low birth weights](#). Among children, SNAP participation has been [linked to a lower risk of anemia and other nutritional deficiencies, and lower likelihood of being at developmental risk or overweight](#).

- Federal anti-hunger programs are most important during economic downturns, [a lesson we learned during the Great Recession](#). Moody's Analytics found that expanding SNAP was [one of the most effective uses of economic stimulus money](#). Undermining the federal right to anti-hunger benefits weakens the ability of the programs to respond to recessionary times.

A SNAP Block Grant Would Be Less Effective in Combating Hunger

2016 marked the [20th anniversary](#) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). PRWORA established state block grants for family income support programs through the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program. In Illinois and throughout the country, this structural change has [caused great harm to children](#) growing up in families with little or no cash income to meet basic needs. Even those who played a central role in crafting PRWORA have recently suggested that [its impact on children and families has been too harsh](#).

Experience with TANF has shown that turning SNAP into a block grant program would guarantee that SNAP would serve fewer households, decrease benefit amounts, become unresponsive during tough economic times, and enable cash-strapped states to direct the block grant to purposes other than combating hunger.

We call on you to oppose Congressional proposals to make cuts or structural limitations (block grants) to our nation's core anti-hunger programs including SNAP, NSLP, CACFP, WIC, and TEFAP. These critical programs are based upon deep and long-standing bipartisan support – rooted in the prevailing notion that nobody in our nation should go hungry. We urge you to use your position as Governor to call on Congress *to protect and strengthen these federal nutrition programs*, ensure they are fully funded, and take steps to assure that all hungry people in our country have access to the nutrition they need to live a healthy, active life.

We stand ready to work with you to achieve this goal. The organizations that have signed on to this letter are prepared to offer data and participant stories on how important these programs are and to work with you in every way we can to protect and strengthen these critical programs. Please let us know how we can help.

For more information about this statement, please contact: Kimberly Drew, Heartland Alliance, at kdrew@heartlandalliance.org; Alicia Huguelet, the Greater Chicago Food Depository at ahuguelet@gcfd.org; Dan Lesser, The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law at danlesser@povertylaw.org; or Cristine Pope, Illinois Hunger Coalition, at cristinepope@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
Chicago Jobs Council
Greater Chicago Food Depository
Heartland Alliance
Illinois Hunger Coalition
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

[LISTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER]

A Just Harvest
A Safe Place
AgeOptions
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
AIM Center for Independent Living
All Chicago
Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County
Alternatives, Inc.
AMITA Health
Asian Human Services
Between Friends
Cambria Food Pantry
Casa Catalina Basic Needs Center
Casa Central
Catholic Charities - Diocese of Joliet
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago
Center for Changing Lives
Central Illinois Food Bank
Central States SER, Jobs for Progress, Inc.
Champaign County Health Care Consumers
Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition
Chinese American Service League
Christian Community Health Center
Church of the Living God -MANNA
Common Pantry
Community Alternatives Unlimited
Community Behavioral Healthcare Association of Illinois
Community Crisis Center, Inc.
Community Health Partnership of IL

Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)
Cook County Department of Public Health
Cook County Health and Hospitals System
Cornerstone Community Outreach
CUMALI
Eastern Illinois Foodbank
Ecker Center for Mental Health
Edwardsville Bread for the World Group
Erikson Institute
EverThrive Illinois
EZRA Multi-Service Center
Family Rescue
Fathers, Families and Healthy Communities
Featherfist
First Presbyterian Church
First United Methodist Church
Ford Heights Community Service Organization
Growing Home
Grundy County Health Department
HCS Family Services
Health & Medicine Policy Research Group
Health and Disability Advocates
Herrin House of Hope
Hesed House
Housing Forward
Humanitarian Service Project
Illinois Action for Children
Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging
Illinois Association of School Social Workers
Illinois Collaboration on Youth
Illinois Public Health Association
Illinois-Iowa Center for Independent Living
Independence Center
Jane Addams Resource Corporation
KAN-WIN
Kendall County Health Department
La Casa Norte
Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center
Lakeview Pantry
Least Of The Brethren Ministry
Lee County Health Department
Legal Council for Health Justice
Leyden Family Service
Life Span
Loaves & Fishes Community Services
March of Dimes

Margaret's Village f/k/a Institute of Women Today
Metropolitan Family Services
Moraine Valley Community College
Mujeres Latinas en Accion
MYSI
NAMI Illinois
New Moms
Niles Township
North Side Housing & Supportive Services
Northeastern IL Agency on Aging
Northern Illinois Food Bank
Northern Illinois Public Health Consortium
Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living (NICIL)
Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry
One Hope United
Open Door Clinic of Greater Elgin
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Patient Innovation Center
Pilgrim Congregational Church United Church of Christ
Plant Chicago
Prairie State Legal Services Inc.
Pride Action Tank
Project IRENE
Project Oz
Puerto Rican Cultural Center
Respond Now
Sankofa Safe Child Initiative
Schaumburg Township
Serving Area Kids
St. Louis Area Foodbank
St.Ailbe Mens Ministry Food Pantry
Stephenson County Health Department
Teen Living programs
The ARK
The Boulevard
The Friendship Center
The Harbour
The Inner Voice, Inc.
The Jeremiah Call Christ Ministry
The Lake County Community Foundation
The Lighthouse Shelter
The Night Ministry
Tri-State Food Bank
United Latin@ Pride
United Way of Illinois
Unity Parenting and Counseling, Inc.

Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Victory Christian Center of Southern Illinois
Voices for Illinois Children
Wayne Township Pantry
West Suburban Community Pantry
Willow Creek Community Church
Windy City Times
Winfield Township
WINGS Program, Inc.
Woodstock Institute
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago
Youth Outreach Services Inc.