

## An Open Letter to Members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation

January 23, 2017

Dear Senate and House Members of the Illinois Delegation:

The undersigned Illinois organizations write to thank you for your unwavering support of federal nutrition programs and to urge your resolve to protect and strengthen these programs against any benefit cuts or changes in entitlement structure in 2017 and beyond.

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.

At the start of a new year, it is important to remember that 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 and the state 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 our Illinois Delegation to stand together to reject cuts or structural limitations (block grants) to our nation's core anti-hunger programs including SNAP, NSLP, CACFP, WIC, SNP, 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 the Illinois Delegation to do everything in its power *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 district-level 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](mailto:kdrew@heartlandalliance.org); Alicia Huguelet, the Greater Chicago Food Depository at [ahuguelet@gcfd.org](mailto:ahuguelet@gcfd.org); Dan Lesser, The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law at [danlesser@povertylaw.org](mailto:danlesser@povertylaw.org); or Cristine Pope, Illinois Hunger Coalition, at [cristinepope@yahoo.com](mailto: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  
Casa Catalina Basic Needs Center  
Casa Catalina Food Pantry  
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  
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 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  
HCS Family Services  
Health & Medicine Policy Research Group  
Health and Disability Advocates  
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  
La Casa Norte  
Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center  
Lakeview Pantry  
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  
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.  
Project IRENE  
Project Oz  
Puerto Rican Cultural Center  
Respond Now  
Sankofa Safe Child Initiative  
Schaumburg Township  
St. Louis Area Foodbank  
St.Ailbe Men's Ministry Food Pantry  
Stephenson County Health Department  
Teen Living programs  
The ARK  
The Boulevard  
The Friendship Center  
The Harbour  
The Inner Voice, Inc.  
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  
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.