

Date

Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member John Boozman
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Glen 'GT' Thompson
400 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member David Scott
468 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Making college students with low incomes a priority in the Farm Bill

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott,

The undersigned organizations urge you to support America's workforce by passing the Enhance Access to SNAP Act which will ensure that low-income college students do not have to choose between their education and eating.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress met the needs of college students who struggled with food insecurity by removing the barriers in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's (SNAP) eligibility requirements for low-income eligible college students to enroll in the program and access healthy and affordable food. These flexibilities have ended and this fall, students are returning to campus without access to vital nutrition support that was needed long before the pandemic began.

A large body of evidence confirms that food insecurity is a significant problem among college students, especially students of color, students with low incomes, older students, and students who are parents.¹² Data from the 2020 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study has provided the first nationally representative picture of food insecurity on campus, revealing that it affected 35% of Black students, 30% of Native American students, and 25% of Hispanic students, as well as 18% of whites and Asians.³ Food insecurity was most prominent at HBCUs and for-profit colleges, but existed throughout public, private, and nonprofit institutions as well. Food insecurity undermines not only the mental and physical health of college students but also their short-term success and

¹<https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/researchwire-summer-2018.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=928cco0a7-1eb3-4dde-a732-18df859bc887>

² <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-95>

³<https://www.diverseeducation.com/reports-data/article/15543689/government-data-reveals-1-in-5-undergrads-are-food-insecure>

long-term financial stability, with detrimental impacts on their academic performance and ability to complete their degree.⁴

The current SNAP eligibility rules for college students, regarding work-study or employment are counterproductive — too often limiting access to this important and effective program⁵ at a time when they are trying to improve their economic well-being by earning a higher education. In order to access SNAP, in addition to meeting income and other qualifications, low-income college students enrolled in higher education at least half-time must perform 20 hours of outside employment or work-study in addition to their full course load.

A full-time course load is typically 12 credits, meaning students may dedicate 36 hours a week to their education – outside of the hours they spend in class. This is typically the minimum. Requiring that they spend an additional 20 hours in a job can prove detrimental to their studies. In fact, it is estimated that working students are about 20% less likely to graduate than their peers who do not work.⁶

As to work-study, while it is commonly included in financial aid awards, it is not guaranteed. The reality is that demand for federal work-study outstrips supply. Only 16% of institutions award Federal Work Study to every eligible student and a low-income student at a community college has just a 5% chance to receive Federal Work Study.⁷

The Enhance Access to SNAP Act would no longer condition low-income college student eligibility on performing 20 hours of outside employment or work-study. This permanent law change is warranted and long overdue. Low-income college students, including many students of color, often face a disproportionate amount of barriers to even getting to college and deserve to be able to focus on their studies once they arrive. Removing these barriers will ensure more equitable SNAP access for low-income college students and better respond to their economic needs. In states like California, which allows more than 127,000 low-income college students to access food assistance

⁴ A Johns Hopkins study found that college students lacking adequate nutrition and food access are approximately 43% less likely to graduate than food-secure peers and 61% less likely to have an advanced degree like a master's or Ph.D.

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2021/food-insecurity-during-college-years-linked-to-lower-graduation-rate>

⁵<https://frac.org/research/resource-library/snap-public-health-role-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-improving-health-well%e2%80%90being-americans>

⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23328584221140410>

⁷ Community College Research Center, Columbia University, Policy Fact Sheet, July 2021: Participation in Federal Work-Study.

<https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/participation-federal-work-study.pdf>

through its CalFresh program, food insecurity among college students has decreased by more than 60%.⁸

Accordingly, we urge you to end these barriers in recognition of students who are struggling with poverty and facing life obstacles. Higher education pursuit and completion are increasingly crucial for an individual's long-term economic success and well-being, which, in turn, contribute to gains for the individual's family, community, and the nation. No one should have to sacrifice food to pursue a higher education. Please pass the Enhance Access to SNAP Act and put low-income college students on an equal footing to success.

Sincerely,

Food Research & Action Center, Unidos US, and National Urban League