[Date]

SNAP Program Design Branch,

Program Development Division

Food and Nutrition Service

3101 Park Center Drive

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Alexandria, VA 22302

Re: Notice of Proposed Rule Making — Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) RIN 0584-AE62

Dear SNAP Program Design Branch:

On behalf of [fill in organization if applicable] I/we appreciate the opportunity to comment on USDA’s Notice of Proposed Rule Making on a Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The proposed changes would cause serious harm to our nation’s students. The proposed rule should be withdrawn.

[FILL IN INFORMATION ABOUT YOU, your school, city, or your organization’s mission.] \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

SNAP plays a critical role in addressing hunger and food insecurity in our community. It is the first line of defense against hunger for low-income families, and participation in SNAP links children from struggling families to much-needed free school meals. SNAP, combined with school breakfast and lunch, helps to ensure that our students are not sitting in classrooms hungry.

Hungry children cannot learn. [Insert information on the impact of hunger on academics, health, and behavior: See information contained in <https://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfast-for-behavior.pdf> and in <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>.]

[Insert information about poverty/need within your school, community, or state. Insert information about the positive impacts that SNAP has for health and well-being and for economic activity for local communities, e.g., see information contained in <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-facts-snap-strengths.pdf>.]

The proposed rule would gut states’ options to eliminate SNAP asset tests and use a higher income test to serve more working households that have significant expenses for shelter and child care. The current policy option is known as “Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility” (or “Cat El”). [See <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/BBCE2019.pdf> for info on which states have adopted Cat El.] The proposed rule would eliminate SNAP benefits for 3.1 million individuals, take free school meals away from the children in those families, and punish people with even meager savings. By USDA’s own estimates, the proposed rule would cut SNAP benefits over five years by $10.543 billion, while increasing SNAP administrative costs by $2.314 billion. Furthermore, USDA concedes that “The proposed rule may also negatively impact food security and reduce the savings rates among those individuals who do not meet the income and resource eligibility requirements for SNAP or the substantial and ongoing requirements for expanded categorical eligibility.”

The impact on SNAP is concerning to any educator/school official, and it will be compounded by reduced access to free school meals among impacted families. The proposed rule failed to include the rule’s impact on the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program in its Regulatory Impact Analysis, but there are reports that the rule would jeopardize automatic access to free school meals for more than 500,000 students. [More info on that point is available via <https://bobbyscott.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/chairman-scott-to-secretary-perdue-release-internal-estimates-showing>.]

Students whose households participate in SNAP are directly certified to receive free school meals. Direct certification helps to ensure that children who need free school meals are certified to receive them, and it reduces administrative work for our school district/school districts in our state/school districts across the country. [Discuss how direct certification generally helped your school district or school nutrition programs.]

The proposed rule also could have a negative impact on the ability of high-needs schools to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students. [Add in language about the benefits of community eligibility, which you can pull from here: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-facts-community-eligibility-provision.pdf> .]

Community eligibility uses the number of children directly certified for free school meals, primarily due to participation in SNAP, to determine if a school is eligible to implement the provision and to set the federal funding for school breakfast and lunch that a school will receive. Community eligibility’s reliance on SNAP direct certification means that some high-needs schools may no longer be eligible or may not find it financially viable to adopt community eligibility. The Regulatory Impact Analysis of the proposed rule failed to determine the impact of the proposed rule on community eligibility.

Already, 3 in 4 school districts are dealing with unpaid school meals fees. [Add insights about your experiences with unpaid school meals fees.] The proposed rule likely will increase school meals debt, as struggling families lose SNAP benefits and free school meals for their children.

Cat El policies have been in place for more than two decades, ensuring that eligible families have access to SNAP and free school meals. Congress rejected efforts to gut Cat El, including during its consideration of the 2005 budget reconciliation and the 2018 Farm Bill. This USDA rulemaking is an attempt to sidestep Congress and is outside USDA’s authority.

[I/We] strongly oppose the proposed rule that would jeopardize our students’ access to free school meals, while at the same time reducing the nutrition available to them at home.

Sincerely,

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