

JAHANA HAYES
5TH DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT
2458 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4476
108 BANK STREET
SECOND FLOOR
WATERBURY, CT 06702
(860) 223-8412
<https://hayes.house.gov>



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
THE WORKFORCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD,
ELEMENTARY, AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION,
FOREIGN AGRICULTURE, AND HORTICULTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LIVESTOCK, DAIRY,
AND POULTRY

March 23, 2023

Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write today with grave concern for the millions of households losing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits due to the recent cost of living increase to Social Security benefits and the termination of the COVID-19 emergency. These changes are causing an undue burden on vulnerable families in our districts, forcing them to make difficult choices on how to put food on the table. While the 8.7% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to Social Security and Supplemental Security Income was welcome news, this action deemed many recipients ineligible for SNAP – ultimately, negating the adjustment entirely. Compiled with the termination of COVID-19 Emergency Allotments, our constituents are struggling to make ends meet. At the very least, families should be able to stay within their limited budget and not go hungry. We ask today what the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is doing to ensure all the individuals who have lost their SNAP benefits do not go hungry.

During a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic, Congress fought to pass the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and maximize SNAP benefits for a historic number of families across the country. In fact, recent numbers show that more than 42 million people participated in SNAP in 2022, the most in recent years and SNAP Emergency Allotments authorized by FFCRA reduced poverty by 9.6 percent and child poverty by 14.0 percent in states utilizing them.¹ Without it, my state of Connecticut will lose \$34 million in SNAP benefits, meaning each household will have \$155 dollars less to spend on food.²

The harm of our constituents losing SNAP benefits and going hungry is something we cannot accept. Early this year, nearly 11 percent of adults reported they did not have enough to eat in the previous week³ and that number is expected to grow. Less money for food means an electricity bill goes unpaid, a car cannot be repaired, or a

¹ <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/34SNAPmonthly-1.pdf> ; www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Effect%20of%20the%20Reevaluated%20Thrifty%20Food%20Plan%20and%20Emergency%20Allotments%20on%20Supplemental%20Nutrition%20Assistance%20Program%20Benefits%20and%20Poverty.pdf

² <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/2-6-23fa.pdf>

³ <https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/?measures=FOODSCARCE>

prescription goes unfilled. In the worst circumstances, hunger can increase the risk of chronic disease and mental health problems such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴

The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 outlines categories of household income that can be excluded when calculating income for SNAP eligibility, including childcare, certain medical expenses, and excess shelter costs. However, most of our constituents are unaware of these deductions, which can be a deciding factor in applying for SNAP and not going hungry.

At a time when many members of Congress are unwilling to adequately increase funding for SNAP, families cannot tolerate a blow to food security while grocery prices continue to skyrocket, despite cooling inflation. We urge USDA to respond to the following questions to ensure SNAP participants can maintain their access to healthy, nutritious foods. We ask that you respond to the following questions by April 3, 2023, so Congress may better understand how to address this matter legislatively.

1. What directives have been shared with state/local SNAP agencies to prepare staff for the end of SNAP Emergency Allotments and the increased Social Security COLA?
2. Have staff members at state and local SNAP agencies been provided with resources or guidance to proactively inform SNAP participants of available deductions?
3. Has the USDA directed state and local SNAP agencies to publicize the awareness of deductions via widespread messaging campaign?
4. What guidance or resources were provided to individuals who were deemed ineligible for SNAP due to the COLA increase?
5. What guidance or resources were provided to participants who saw a decrease in SNAP benefits due to the termination of SNAP Emergency Allotments?

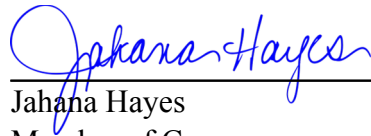
SNAP is a demonstrated program that improves the employment, health, family security, and nutrition outcomes for millions of people across the country.⁵ We are committed to strengthening and safeguarding this life-stabilizing program.

We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to your response.

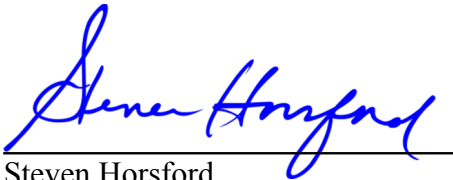
Sincerely,

⁴ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/3-ways-hunger-affects-your-body>

⁵ <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/policybasics-SNAP-6-9-22.pdf>



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Subcommittee
on Nutrition, Foreign Agriculture,
and Horticulture



Steven Horsford
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



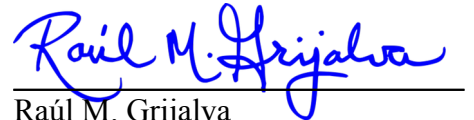
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



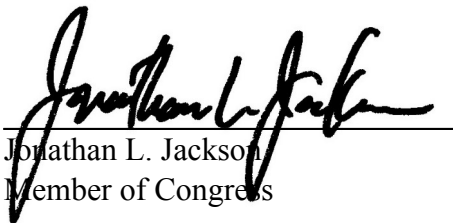
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



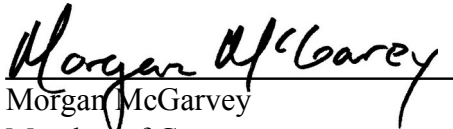
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress




Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress




Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress



Morgan McGarvey
Member of Congress



Sherla Jackson Lee
Member of Congress


Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress


Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress


David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress


Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

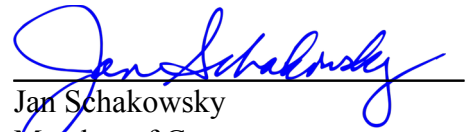

Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress


Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

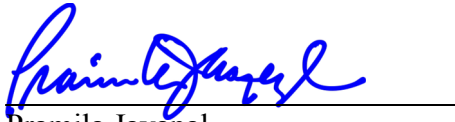

Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



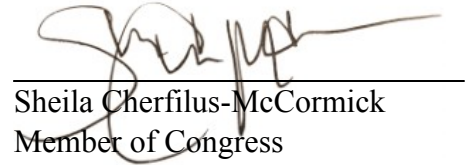
Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



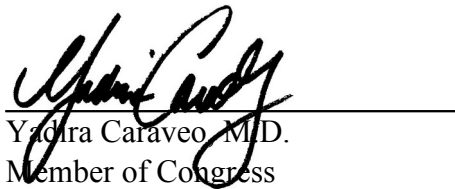
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



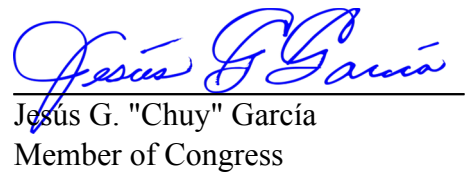
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



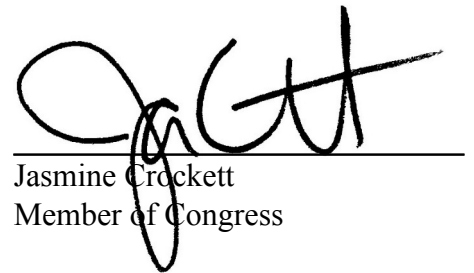
Yadira Caraveo, M.D.
Member of Congress



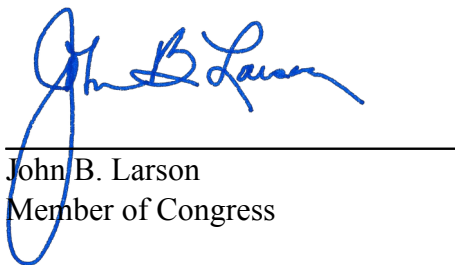
Jesus G. "Chuy" Garcia
Member of Congress



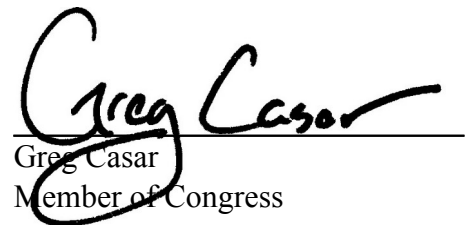
Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



John B. Larson
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress

Andrea Salinas

Andrea Salinas

Member of Congress