

September 9, 2020

Senator John Kennedy
416 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kennedy and Senator Cassidy,

As you consider additional COVID-19 relief, we write to urge you to increase SNAP benefits by 15 percent for the duration of this public health crisis and economic downturn in the final relief package. This letter represents 31 Louisiana organizations who work directly with Louisianans across the state who are struggling to stay afloat throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pre-pandemic, more than 751,000 Louisianans were at risk of hunger, however the need for emergency food assistance continues to rise, and, now, more than 1 million Louisianans¹ are estimated to be at risk of experiencing hunger. Among those experiencing greater need are hourly-wage and other gig-economy employees who are suddenly out of work, school children who've lost access to daily school or summer program breakfasts and lunches, college students learning from home with no access to meal plans or work study jobs, and seniors with limited access to food who are suddenly seeing their retirement savings dwindling.

As the last line of defense in the fight against hunger, Louisiana food banks are serving nearly 70% more households than pre-pandemic levels with a significant proportion of those being households who are entirely new to the emergency food system.

Since its inception, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has served as the cornerstone program in the nation's fight against hunger. Under normal conditions, it is estimated that for every meal provided by a food bank, SNAP provides nine. However, with the current historically high rates of unemployment, food insecurity, and individuals accessing the emergency food system, SNAP is more important than ever to ensure that Louisiana families can keep food on the table for the duration of this crisis and beyond.

By design, SNAP is particularly effective in addressing food insecurity during times of crisis, natural disasters, or economic downturn. While the scope of need has been remarkably high, this responsiveness was no different during the COVID pandemic; nearly 284,000 new households enrolled in SNAP in the first 5 months of the pandemic in Louisiana alone. The benefits provided through the program are then spent at authorized retailers and farmers markets around the state, providing much needed revenue within our local economy.

In 2009, in response to the devastating effects of the Great Recession, Congress passed a comprehensive relief package which included a similar, temporary 15% increase to SNAP benefits. Subsequently, the Congressional Budget Office's evaluation of this package² found increased SNAP benefits to be one of the most effective measures to create jobs and boost the economy during times of economic downturn. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates

¹ Joe DiStefano, "Mapping a Path to an Equitable Recovery in Louisiana: A Deep Dive into Food Security and the COVID-19 Crisis," Urban Footprint, May 21, 2020. <https://urbanfootprint.com/mapping-a-path-to-an-equitable-recovery-in-louisiana/>

² "Estimated Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on Employment and Economic Output in 2014," Congressional Budget Office, February 2015. <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/114th-congress-2015-2016/reports/49958-ARRA.pdf>

that for every dollar spent on SNAP generates \$1.54 in economic activity³ while generating more than 13,000 jobs; during this time of economic downturn, the ripple-effects generated from SNAP benefit spending are particularly important.

A strong Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is key to helping Louisianans and their communities weather this crisis and the ensuing economic downturn, but it can do more. Strains on the food supply chain have caused food prices to rise in grocery stores across the state, leaving SNAP recipients able to buy less food with the same benefit amount. In Louisiana, the 15% increase would result in an additional \$25 per individual or \$54 per SNAP household⁴ giving families a small but vital supplement to their grocery budget while these food prices remain high.

We must continue to strengthen and expand the SNAP program so that it is accessible and effective for all eligible families facing hunger during this time. We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to stand with the hundreds of thousands of Louisianans receiving SNAP benefits and include a 15% increase in SNAP benefits in the upcoming COVID-19 response package for the duration of the public health crisis and resulting economic downturn.

Sincerely,

American Heart Association
Broadmoor Improvement Association
Feeding Louisiana
First Baptist Community Food Pantry
Food Bank of Central Louisiana
Food Bank of Northeast Louisiana
Food Rescue US-New Orleans
Hadassah New Orleans
HOPE Alliance Community Development Corporation
Jewish Family Service of Greater New Orleans
Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans
Louisiana Appleseed
Louisiana Association of United Ways
Louisiana Budget Project
Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families

Louisiana Public Health Institute
Market Umbrella
New Orleans Food Policy Council
No Kid Hungry Louisiana
No Waste Louisiana
Recirculating Farms Coalition
Second Harvest Food Bank
Slow Food Baton Rouge
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund
SPROUT NOLA
The First 72+
The Walls Project
Top Box Foods Louisiana
Tulane Nutrition
United Way of Southeast Louisiana
Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic Training

³ Patrick Canning and Rosanna Mentzer Morrison, "Quantifying the Impact of SNAP Benefits on the U.S. Economy and Jobs," USDA, Economic Research Service, July 18, 2019 <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/july/quantifying-the-impact-of-snap-benefits-on-the-us-economy-and-jobs/>.

⁴ Dottie Rosenbaum, Stacy Dean, and Zoe Neuberger, "The Case for Boosting SNAP Benefits in Next Major Economic Response Package," The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 22, 2020. https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-case-for-boosting-snap-benefits-in-next-major-economic-response-package#_ftn1