

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 1, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20228

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express serious concern regarding USDA's Proposed Rulemaking, "Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)," RIN 0584-AE62. Restricting Categorical Eligibility would make it more difficult for veterans to qualify for needed nutrition assistance through SNAP, thus putting their health and well-being at risk. We urge USDA to withdraw this proposal, which would take our country in the wrong direction in terms of caring for America's veterans.

Under current law, states have the option to eliminate asset tests and use a higher income threshold when determining SNAP eligibility. Categorical Eligibility is a highly effective and popular state flexibility option that has been utilized by over 40 states over the past two decades. While states must still determine each individual's benefit level, Categorical Eligibility ensures that low-income working families with modest savings can still receive SNAP. The impact of USDA's proposal would be 3.1 million people—including many veterans—losing critical nutrition assistance from SNAP.¹ We know that this proposed rule change would have a disproportionate impact on households that include someone with a disability, and households with a disabled veteran are nearly twice as likely to be food insecure as households that do not have someone with a disability.² Furthermore, since children in households that receive SNAP are automatically eligible for free school meals, over 500,000 children would lose access to free school meals as a result of this proposal.

¹ "Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)." *Federal Register*. Publication Date: July 24, 2018. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/07/24/2019-15670/revision-of-categorical-eligibility-in-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

² "SNAP Helps Almost 1.4 Million Low-Income Veterans, Including Thousands in Every State." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. November 8, 2018. <http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance-snap-helps-almost-15-million-low-income-veterans-including-thousands-in>.

There are many circumstances that might lead veterans and their families to seek nutrition assistance. Veterans often have difficulty finding and maintaining meaningful employment as they transition to the civilian workforce and rely on SNAP as a bridge to support themselves and their families during the job search. Though an estimated 1.4 million veterans live in households that participate in SNAP, we know that many more veterans are eligible for the program but do not participate. A recent study by Impaq International found that of veterans who were eligible for SNAP benefits, only 1 in 3 are current recipients.³ We also note high rates of food insecurity among veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are nearly double the rates for the general population⁴. The data is clear: USDA should be doing more to increase SNAP participation for veterans who experience food insecurity, rather than proposing new restrictions that worsen hunger among those who have made great sacrifices for our country.

In addition to our concern with the proposed rule, we would request you provide the following information to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs:

1. How many veterans currently utilize SNAP benefits?
2. How many veterans will be impacted by the proposed rulemaking "Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?"

It is important to note that Congress expressed its support for Categorical Eligibility in the 2018 bipartisan Farm Bill. It is inappropriate for USDA to act in a way that is inconsistent with the will of Congress, diminishing states' rights to effectively meet the needs of their citizens and increasing hunger in this country.

Eliminating Categorical Eligibility risks the well-being of thousands of veterans at a time when we should be doing more to help them. Those who have served our country deserve better.

Sincerely,



MIKE LEVIN
Member of Congress



MARK TAKANO
Member of Congress

³ "Issue Brief: Veterans and Food Insecurity," *Impaq International*. November 2018. https://www.impaqint.com/sites/default/files/issue-briefs/VeteransFoodInsecurity_IssueBrief_V1.3.pdf.

⁴ "Food Insecurity Among Veterans of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," *Public Health Nutrition*. By Rachel Widome, Agnes Jensen, Ann Bangerter, and Steven Fu. May 8, 2014. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24806818>.



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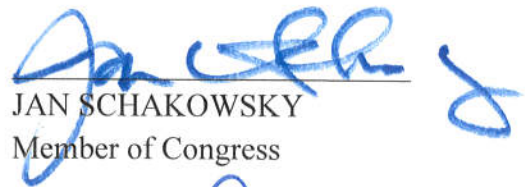
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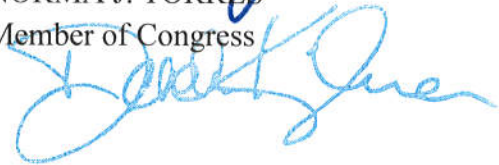
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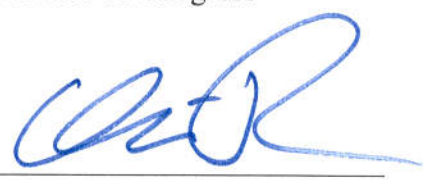
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