

The The Honorable Richard Blumenthal  
Honorable Chuck Schumer The Honorable Chris Murphy  
The Honorable Kristen Gillibrand U.S. Senate, representing Connecticut  
U.S. Senate, representing New York  
The Honorable Susan Collins  
The Honorable Bernie Sanders The Honorable Angus King  
The Honorable Patrick Leahy U.S. Senate, representing Maine  
U.S. Senate, representing Vermont  
The Honorable Edward Markey  
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse The Honorable Elizabeth Warren  
The Honorable Jack Reed U.S. Senate, representing Massachusetts  
U.S. Senate, representing Rhode Island  
The Honorable Maggie Hassen The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen U.S. Senate,  
representing New Hampshire

June 11, 2018

Dear Senate Members of the Northeast Region:

Thank you all for your support in strengthening nutrition assistance programs in the United States. We also appreciate your critical votes in both July and September of 2017 against multiple attempts to repeal of the Affordable Care Act and your hard work to protect vital health care services for all residents of New England and New York. We write as health organizations throughout the region to urge your support in defending against cuts in the nation's core nutrition program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), our country's first defense against hunger.

We know that access to affordable health care is essential, but not enough on its own for patients to be healthy. Many treatments are less effective if patients do not have adequate access to enough food, a condition known as food insecurity. SNAP has been shown to reduce food insecurity<sup>1</sup> and thus, as representatives of the health care community, we see firsthand the importance of SNAP for optimal health. Restricting access to SNAP or cutting benefit levels threaten the health of our patients and make providers' jobs of treating illness more difficult and costly.

There is a robust body of research that underscores what health providers see clinically. Researchers from Children's HealthWatch at Boston Medical Center estimated the total annual avoidable health, education, and lost productivity costs of food insecurity in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at more than \$2.4 billion<sup>2</sup> and over \$178 billion nationwide.<sup>3</sup> Studies conducted by researchers across the Northeast have detailed the

positive health benefits of SNAP. Research has demonstrated SNAP's ability to effectively reduce healthcare costs nationally.<sup>4,5</sup> SNAP has also been associated with positive self-assessed health status as well as significant reductions in the number of days people report staying in bed due to illness and the number of doctors' visits other than check-ups.<sup>6</sup> A longitudinal study of "dual eligible" low income older adults found that participation in SNAP reduced the incidence of hospitalization and long term care of older adults.<sup>7</sup> SNAP is also associated with positive educational outcomes; one study found that SNAP may contribute to reductions in educational delays among children living in poverty, having positive lifelong consequences.<sup>8</sup>

Any changes to SNAP that cut benefits or threaten the program's effectiveness to respond to food insecurity will harm residents of all ages in the Northeast and likely increase health care costs. We are specifically concerned about efforts on the House side to reinstate a benefits cliff for low-wage families, increase paperwork requirements, eliminate the connection of SNAP to fuel assistance, and impose rigid sanction-driven work requirements. Such proposals harm families with children working low-paying, unstable jobs as well as seniors, veterans and persons with disabilities.

As a cornerstone of our states' public health infrastructures, we need your help to actively push back against health-harming proposals. We urge you to oppose any Farm Bill that cuts or restricts access to SNAP. We request your leadership to ensure SNAP continues to be an effective and efficient program for promoting health and well-being and saving on costly health services.

Sincerely,

Connecticut Connecticut State Medical Society  
Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of  
Pediatrics National Physicians Alliance of Connecticut  
Community Health Center Association of Connecticut  
Connecticut Children's Medical Center Community  
Health Center, Inc Universal Health Care Foundation  
Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Inc. Connecticut  
Council of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Every  
Woman CT

Maine Maine Medical Society Maine Chapter of  
the American Academy of Pediatrics MaineHealth

## Consumers for Affordable Health

Massachusetts Massachusetts Medical Society  
Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of  
Pediatrics  
Massachusetts Academy of Family  
Physicians Boston Medical Center  
Holyoke Medical Center Partners  
HealthCare Hilltown Community Health  
Center Eliot Community Human Services  
Health Law Advocates Disability Policy  
Consortium Health Care For All Harvard  
Pilgrim Health Foundation Children's  
HealthWatch

New Hampshire Dartmouth-Hitchcock New Hampshire Medical  
Society New Hampshire Chapter of the American Academy of  
Pediatrics New Hampshire Chapter of the American Academy  
of Family Physicians Bi- State Primary Care Association  
Dartmouth Hitchcock Health Greater Seacoast Community  
Health Progressive Doctors Harbor Care Health and Wellness  
Center Coos County Family Health Services New Futures, Inc.

New York Medical Society of the State of New York New York  
State Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics New  
York State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics New York State  
Nurses Association National Physicians Alliance - New York  
Mount Sinai School of Medicine University of Rochester  
Medical Center Community Care Alliance Doctors for America  
- New York Commission on the Public's Health System St.  
Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction, Inc. Metro New York Health  
Care for All Vision Urbana, Inc. Citizen Action of New York

Rhode Island Rhode Island Medical  
Society Rhode Island Public Health  
Institute Mental Health Recovery Coalition  
of RI Rhode Island Coalition for Children  
and Families

Vermont Vermont Medical Society Vermont Chapter  
of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital  
Southwestern Vermont Health Care Community  
Health Centers of Burlington Dartmouth Hitchcock  
Health OneCare Vermont RiseVT Northwest  
Healthy Roots Collaborative Bennington - Blueprint  
for Health

<sup>1</sup> Mabli J, Ohls J, Dragoset L, Castner L, Santos B. *Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service; 2013. Available at:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25644357> <sup>2</sup> Cook JT, Poblacion A. *An Avoidable \$2.4 Billion Cost: The Estimated health-Related Costs of Food Insecurity and Hunger in Massachusetts*. Report on research sponsored by the Greater Boston Food Bank, Boston, 2017. Available at:

[www.macostofhunger.org](http://www.macostofhunger.org) <sup>3</sup> Cook JT, Poblacion A. *Estimating the Health-Related Costs of Food Insecurity and Hunger*. In Bread for the World 2016 Hunger Report. Available at: [www.hungerreport.org](http://www.hungerreport.org). <sup>4</sup>

Sonik RA. *Massachusetts Inpatient Medicaid Cost Response to Increased Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits*. AJP, 2016;106 (3):443-8. Available at:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26794167> <sup>5</sup> Berkowitz S, Seligman H, Rigdon J. *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation and Health Care Expenditures Among Low-Income Adults*. JAMA, 2017; 177(11):1642-1649. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28973507> <sup>6</sup>

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Cahill R, Wolff JL, Ong P, Zielinskie G, Betley C. *Does the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Affect Hospital Utilization Among Older Adults? The Case of Maryland*. Population Health Management, 2017;0(0). Available at: [http://www.bdtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Pop-Health-](http://www.bdtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Pop-Health-Mgmt_Hospitalizations_linked.pdf)

[Mgmt\\_Hospitalizations\\_linked.pdf](http://www.bdtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Pop-Health-Mgmt_Hospitalizations_linked.pdf) <sup>8</sup> Beharie, N. Mercado, M and McKay, M. *A Protective Association*

*between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes among Children of Economically Strained Households*, National Institutes of Health. Available at:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5513186/>