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April 25, 2018

Representative Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), I am writing to express the Caucus' strong opposition to the latest iteration of the Farm Bill, which passed out of the House Committee on Agriculture last week and which is expected to be considered on the House Floor the week of May 7th. It is disgraceful that an historically bipartisan effort has devolved into a partisan attack on a critical nutrition program that feeds millions of American citizens, Black, White and otherwise. The bill that passed out of Committee along party lines last week would cut Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits by more than \$20 billion and greatly reduce enrollment in this critical and moral program through expanded work requirements and more stringent eligibility rules.

These work requirements create new red tape for states and for low-income families that very easily could result in an increase in food-insecure families as a result. The program requires too many new systems to be executed perfectly and assumes that robustly funded job training programs and job opportunities are available to all within its footprint. This is a foolish assumption not supported by evidence which can only serve to do intentional damage to many of those most vulnerable in our society. On top of this, the bill severely underfunds programming that is supposed to ease the transition to this new paradigm. It is not hard to predict what will happen. Neither states nor families are prepared to comply with this poorly conceived regime and the chaos that could result is simply unacceptable. This is not how policy should be made. We cannot let ideology drive our policy outcomes. Real lives hang in the balance.

The bill's newly created work requirements are also going to ensure that more Americans go hungry. This terrible initiative creates no guarantee that good paying jobs are going to fill the void of reliable SNAP assistance. These experiments with work requirements in the states have already proven that many low-income Americans, who already have challenges securing good pay and good benefits, are going to be even more adversely impacted. These work requirements, which are already being imposed on some Medicaid recipients, are poorly researched,

designed, and executed. They only serve to punish people who face enough difficulties, with little to no benefit for the worker or his or her family.

The bill's eligibility requirements and benefit cuts would result in about 2 million people losing their assistance entirely or having it reduced. This will also result in kicking 265,000 children out of school meal programs that help ensure they can learn in a healthy environment. At a moment in our country with record stock markets and record generosity to the super wealthy, throwing lower income families off of nutrition programs is one of the most morally abhorrent actions Congress could take at this time. Let me be perfectly clear: If passed into law, this morally bankrupt legislation, coming on the heels of a \$2.3 trillion tax cut for the wealthy and massive corporations, would eliminate or significantly reduce benefits for low-income people. The drafters of this mean-spirited legislation should be ashamed of themselves, as should people of good conscience that consider supporting it as it advances through the legislative process.

Not only are these "reforms" morally bankrupt, they reflect an amateurish application of economics. In 2017, the SNAP program delivered close to \$64 billion in economic benefits to Americans across this nation, generating more than \$114 billion in net economic activity. These SNAP benefits help people put food on the table *and* contribute to spending and job creation in local communities. The drafters of this legislation have failed to take into account the multiplier effect of the current levels of funding for SNAP and should go back to the drawing board to ensure that further unintended consequences, such as the impact on jobs, small businesses, and food deserts, do not materialize.

Like me, I know that you came to Congress to make positive change in people's lives. I doubt that you came here to take votes on legislation that could do affirmative damage to the lives of those who are already struggling to make the American Dream a reality in their lives. It is not too late to do the right thing. The Congressional Black Caucus calls upon the drafters of this bill and its supporters to abandon this proposal and reengage the Committee in a bipartisan conversation that reflects the American values of kindness, charity, and goodwill to our neighbors. This legislation fails all moral tests. The CBC will not be complicit in its advancement and calls on all legislators of good will to join us in opposing this legislation in its current form.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Richmond", with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Cedric L. Richmond