

# THE FUTURE OF SNAP: MOVING PAST THE PANDEMIC

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION, OVERSIGHT, AND DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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## CONTENTS

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	Page
Bacon, Hon. Don, a Representative in Congress from Nebraska, opening statement .....	4
Submitted statement on behalf of Inmar, Inc. ....	66
Hayes, Hon. Jahana, a Representative in Congress from Connecticut, opening statement .....	1
Prepared statement .....	3
Submitted article .....	63
Submitted letter on behalf of Hannah Walker, Vice President, Political Affairs, FMI—The Food Industry Association .....	64
Sablan, Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho, a Delegate in Congress from Northern Mariana Islands, prepared statement .....	6
WITNESSES	
Bauer, Ph.D., Lauren Lowenstein, Fellow in Economic Studies, The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C. ....	7
Prepared statement .....	9
Submitted questions .....	72
Davis, Odessa, Washington, D.C.; on behalf of No Kid Hungry Campaign, Share our Strength .....	18
Prepared statement .....	19
Submitted question .....	75
Whitford, D.P.T., James, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Watered Gardens Ministries, Joplin, MO .....	20
Prepared statement .....	22
Supplementary material .....	69
Boynton-Jarrett, M.D., Sc.D., Renée, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine; Pediatrician, Boston Medical Center; Founder and Executive Director, Vital Village Networks, Boston, MA .....	25
Prepared statement .....	27
Submitted questions .....	75
Wilson, Rachel, Orlando, FL; on behalf of Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida .....	30
Prepared statement .....	31



## THE FUTURE OF SNAP: MOVING PAST THE PANDEMIC

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NUTRITION, OVERSIGHT, AND DEPARTMENT  
OPERATIONS,  
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
*Washington, D.C.*

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 12:00 p.m., via Zoom, Hon. Jahana Hayes [Chairwoman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Hayes, McGovern, Adams, Rush, Sablan, Carbajal, Lawson, Kuster, Panetta, Pingree, Spanberger, Bacon, Crawford, DesJarlais, Hartzler, Baird, Cloud, Cammack, and Letlow.

Staff present: Lyron Blum-Evitts, Ross Hettervig, Chu-Yuan Hwang, Lisa Shelton, Katherine Stewart, Caleb Crosswhite, Jennifer Tiller, Erin Wilson, and Dana Sandman.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAHANA HAYES, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CONNECTICUT

The CHAIRWOMAN. This hearing of the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations entitled, *The Future of SNAP: Moving Past the Pandemic*, will come to order. Welcome, and thank you for joining us here today. After brief opening remarks, Members will receive testimony from our witnesses today, and then the hearing will be open to Member questions. Members will be recognized in order of seniority, alternating between Majority and Minority Members, and in order of arrival for those Members who have joined us after the hearing was called to order. When you are recognized, you will be asked to unmute your microphone and will have 5 minutes to ask your questions or make a comment. If you are not speaking, I ask that you remain muted in order to minimize background noise. In order to get as many questions as possible, the timer will stay consistently visible on your screen. In consultation with the Ranking Member and pursuant to Rule XI(e), I want to make sure Members of the Subcommittee are aware that other Members of the full Committee may join us today.

Good afternoon and thank you, everyone, for participating today in the first hearing in the 117th Congress of the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations. I am honored to serve as Chairwoman of this crucial Subcommittee and want to publicly express my full commitment to crafting impactful, lasting policy.

Before beginning the substance of today's hearing, I want to emphasize to my colleagues on this Subcommittee that our work will require bipartisan engagement and cooperation. Over this Congress, we will be tasked with evaluating our response to COVID-19, leading our communities out of concurrent crises, and tackling a new farm bill. I am steadfast in my commitment to ensuring everyone has a seat at the table as we approach these monumental tasks. I look forward to working with the Ranking Member, Mr. Bacon, and all the other Members of this Subcommittee. Please know that my door is always open to you.

In addition to my distinguished friends and colleagues on the Subcommittee, we are very pleased and grateful to welcome a panel of experts today. Thank you all for being here. I look forward to introducing you and hearing your testimony shortly.

The title of today's hearing is, *The Future of SNAP: Moving Past the Pandemic*. The purpose of this hearing is to recount the lessons we have learned about food insecurity and nutrition access during the COVID-19 crisis, and also to use those lessons as a roadmap for closing the glaring gaps in policy which left so many Americans food-insecure in the first place.

After witnessing the events of the past 15 months, there should be no doubt about the tremendous need for SNAP and other nutrition programs. Temporary increases to SNAP benefits and accommodations made to state administrators, along with creative approaches to feeding students learning from home and the amazing work of food banks across the country, have helped to guard against the worst consequences that could have occurred during these concurrent health and economic crises. The built-in responsiveness of SNAP to shifting economic conditions has supported working families who, during this crisis, found themselves in uncertain economic conditions. Thankfully, efforts to expand and strengthen the nutrition safety nets have, for the most part, succeeded.

As we will hear from our panel of expert witnesses today, SNAP during COVID has been crucial for those suddenly without an income, as well as parents forced to choose between a job and caring for their children in remote school. Ms. Davis and Ms. Wilson will testify to the strain of a household suddenly without the means to provide. Drs. Bauer and Boynton-Jarrett will offer data and clinical evidence of the precarious situation created by the pandemic, especially for women and children, and how nutrition assistance is essential. Dr. Whitford, Executive Director of Watered Gardens ministries in Missouri, will talk about the charity work of his mission and work training center.

This testimony, I hope, will illustrate what I know to be true from first-hand experience: that SNAP is a hand-up, and not a hand-out, for Americans striving to achieve self-sufficiency. Today's testimony will show that fear of hunger is not an economic motivator, it is an obstacle to success, and a threat to public health. And it will show that hunger does not discriminate. It exists in every one of our districts. Hunger affects our friends, our neighbors, the elderly, the disabled, single mothers and working fathers, and people of all races and beliefs.

During this hearing, I am sure we may also hear some concerns about SNAP. Things like, “SNAP discourages work”; that “emergency allotments and a 15 percent increase in benefits are too expensive”; or that “there is fraud within the program that requires updated quality control measures.” While anecdotally those things, at times, may be true, these programs do work and they are a life-saver. I know this because they saved my life.

As a young mother, I worked two jobs and attended school and I still qualified for benefits. SNAP allowed me to put food in my children’s mouths while I worked my way towards economic stability.

Even when I was stable and could support my family, my commitment towards making sure that people had access to food continued. As a missionary in my church, I worked with the Bread of Life Ministry for many years to promote feeding hungry people around the world, and as a volunteer in my community, I have spent countless hours at local food banks.

That memory of stress, and the threat of hunger for my children remains a reality for me, that I take into this work as Chairwoman of this Subcommittee. My lived experiences have shown me that SNAP, and other safety net programs, are not just hand-outs for people unwilling to work toward self-sufficiency. They are critical supports which ensure that hunger is not another obstacle in the way of Americans striving for stability.

On this Subcommittee, we have a unique opportunity to ensure that these supports are strengthened for Americans in each of our districts. I am excited about this work and I look forward to continuing to deliver on this promise for the American people.

With that, I want to once again welcome all of you today and give a special thanks to our panel for sharing their time and expertise.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Hayes follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JAHANA HAYES, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS  
FROM CONNECTICUT

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During this hearing, I am sure we may also hear some concerns regarding the SNAP program. That SNAP benefits discourage work; that emergency allotments and a 15% increase in benefits are just too expensive; that there is fraud within the SNAP program requiring updated quality control measures. While anecdotally there may be such instances—these programs work and they are lifesavers. I know this because they saved my life.

As a young mother, I worked two jobs and attended school. But I still qualified for benefits. SNAP allowed me to put food in my children's mouths while I worked my way to economic stability.

That memory of stress, and the threat of hunger, is a reality that I take into this work as Chairwoman of this Subcommittee. My lived experience has shown me that SNAP, and other safety net programs, are not just hand-outs for people unwilling to work toward self-sufficiency. They are a critical support which ensures that hunger is not another obstacle in the way of Americans striving for stability.

On this Subcommittee, we have an opportunity to ensure that these supports are strengthened for Americans in each of our districts. I am excited about this work and look forward to continuing to deliver for the American people.

With that, I want to once again welcome all of you today and give a special thanks to our panel for sharing their time and expertise.

The CHAIRWOMAN. I would like to welcome at this time the distinguished Ranking Member, the gentleman from Nebraska, Mr. Bacon, for any opening remarks that he would like to give.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DON BACON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM NEBRASKA**

Mr. BACON. Well, thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I appreciate your words. It has been a pleasure working with you in the 117th Congress in this capacity, and I appreciate the spirit of teamwork that you are bringing to the Subcommittee.

I just want to initially state, too, that I agree with you. SNAP fulfills a much-needed program in our community, and I appreciate your personal experiences with that.

With that said, though, I do think it merits some review now as we are coming out of COVID, how we want to go forward as we are moving past this COVID pandemic.

I do want to offer a good afternoon to everyone. I want to welcome all of our witnesses. Thank you for taking time to share your



knowledge, experiences, and advice on how to best move forward in our missions to ensure those in need have access to SNAP.

Based on the title of this hearing, I am hopeful we can use today to discuss not only the Department's emergency response to COVID, but where improvement is needed and how we can better serve our communities. We need to start planning a return to normalcy as progress takes us past COVID. We responded effectively, in my mind, to COVID, but now we are on the tail end of this pandemic. Our economy is coming back open, and our plans should adjust accordingly.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on the Subcommittee's previous work related to SNAP. I believe there are four things to consider as Congress shifts from emergency spending and programming to a thoughtful policy and a return to normalcy.

First, serving recipients through innovation, flexibility, and program delivery. We need to reassess this. Pursuing independence through employment and training. Returning to and maintaining program integrity, and improving access and promoting healthy foods and improve nutrition. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that there are myriad opportunities for serving families. There is not just one way to guarantee nutritious foods make it into the hands of those who need it. Whether it be the expansion of online pilots or the utilization of new distribution channels in the Farmers to Families Food Box Program, we need to think bigger on how to ensure qualified households not only have access to benefits and relevant services, but can use them in a way that reflects 2021 and not 1972.

While work waivers granted through the former and current Administrations were logical in response to COVID-19, they appear now, according to some news reports and some reporting, to be keeping some employable individuals disengaged, which reaps significant negative impacts on the families who want nothing more than to earn a living and to a small business community who want to get business back to 100 percent employment. If the Department and states are serious about inspiring hope and change in the lives of SNAP recipients, then it is high time to utilize the resources associated with SNAP employment and training, as well as state-based employment readiness services to do just that. These programs must emphasize a multi-generational approach. We are long past trying and testing—programming.

As it relates to integrity and the principles of SNAP, many facets of quality control have been waived throughout the pandemic. As the program shifts to a post-pandemic role, these waivers need to expire as written, and states should return to normal modes of data collection, just as the Department should return to normal modes of analysis.

Last, and something I believe strongly in, is access to and consumption of healthy foods. Diets cannot be improved without sufficient access to healthy foods. Employment, including military readiness, healthcare costs, and general longevity are highly dependent on the foods we consume. So, together with improved nutrition educational initiatives, the nutrition research funding secured in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, and the existing library

of research on healthy eating, USDA is positioned to improve the nutrition of millions of households.

So, as we approach the next farm bill, it is time to rethink targeted and beneficial healthy eating incentives, and more effective nutrition education strategies to help all families. I would like to say I am excited about where we go from here, and I thank you for your indulgence. I look forward to our witnesses' testimony, and Madam Chairwoman, I yield back to you.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Mr. Bacon, for that opening statement.

The chair would request that other Members submit their opening statements for the record so witnesses may begin their testimony, and to ensure that there is ample time for questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sablan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN, A DELEGATE IN CONGRESS FROM NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Thank you, Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and the Committee for putting together this important hearing on the Future of SNAP.

As everyone on the Committee knows, the Northern Mariana Islands, my district is not part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but instead receives assistance through a block grant, NAP. It has been fixed at \$12.148 million for a decade, without any regard to changes in food costs, natural disasters, and most recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Committee and the witnesses understand, this block grant has seriously fallen short. I have had to ask for supplemental funding year after year, and in the meantime families in the Marianas get removed from the program and benefits are cut.

This hearing today is entitled "The Future of SNAP: Moving Past the Pandemic," unfortunately my constituents in the Marianas have been left behind, SNAP is a necessary part of moving my district forward out of the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future.

Ms. Davis and Ms. Wilson, thank you so much for telling your stories. There are thousands of families in the Marianas struggling with food insecurity and hearing from individuals like yourself shows me and the rest of the Committee how vital SNAP is for all Americans.

The CHAIRWOMAN. At this time, I will begin to introduce the witnesses. I am pleased to welcome such a distinguished panel of witnesses for our hearing today. Our witnesses bring to our hearing a wide range of experience and expertise, and I thank you for joining us.

Our first witness is Dr. Lauren Bauer. Dr. Bauer is a Fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institute. Her research focuses on social and safety net policies, including on Federal nutrition assistance programs and education. She is a member of the New York City Office of Community Schools Research Advisory Council and holds a B.A. in history and a M.A. and Ph.D. in human development and social policy, with a certificate in education sciences, all from Northwestern University. Welcome.

Our next witness today is Ms. Odessa Davis. Ms. Davis is a mother, a college student, and a para-educator with Montgomery County Public Schools. She recently graduated from Montgomery College with a degree in business management, and is also a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Miami. She also volunteers for the Community Action Agency, using her culinary skills to prepare food as a volunteer chef. Welcome.

To introduce our third witness, I am pleased to yield to our colleague on the Agriculture Committee, the distinguished woman from Missouri, Mrs. Hartzler.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Thank you, Chairwoman Hayes. It is an honor to introduce Missouri's own Dr. James Whitford. Dr. Whitford has spent more than 2 decades fighting the perils of poverty and their impact on our communities. The organization he and his wife founded, Watered Gardens, serves both the poor and homeless, providing an array of services, including employment readiness, education, and relief-type needs. Watered Gardens Workshop is a fascinating approach where people in need trade their time for services. Dr. Whitford has a personal story that drives his work, and believes that charity should be coupled with an expectation of productivity. I welcome James to today's proceedings, and I look forward to his testimony.

So, thank you, Chairwoman Hayes. I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, Mrs. Hartzler. Thank you for your comments.

Our next witness today is Ms. Rachel Wilson. Ms. Wilson is a self-employed business owner in central Florida. She is trained as a cosmetologist and works as an independent hairdresser. She is also a mother to her three children. Welcome.

Our fifth and final witness today is Dr. Renée Boynton-Jarrett. Dr. Boynton-Jarrett is a pediatrician and social epidemiologist, and the founding Director of the Vital Village Community Engagement Network. Her work focuses on the role of early life adversity as life course social determinants of health. Her current work is developing community-based strategies to promote child well-being and reduce child maltreatment, using a collective impact approach in three Boston neighborhoods.

Welcome to all of our witnesses today. We will now proceed to hearing your testimony. You will each have 5 minutes. The timer should be visible to you on your screen and will count down to 0, at which point your time has expired.

Dr. Bauer, please begin when you are ready.

**STATEMENT OF LAUREN LOWENSTEIN BAUER, Ph.D., FELLOW  
IN ECONOMIC STUDIES, THE HAMILTON PROJECT,  
BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Dr. BAUER. Good afternoon Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. My name is Dr. Lauren Bauer, and I am a Fellow in Economic Studies at Brookings Institution, where I am affiliated with The Hamilton Project. In my testimony today, I will describe the state of food insecurity in the U.S., assess how Federal nutrition assistance programs have supported families and the economy over the past year, and apply evidence toward making recommendations on the future of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Food insecurity, especially when experienced by children, has been an acute and persistent problem in the U.S. over the past year. Congress has taken vitally important action and prevented even greater hardship. During the pandemic, nationally representative surveys consistently found overall rates of household food in-

security above 20 percent, and that more than one in three households with children were experiencing food insecurity.

Starting in January 2021, food insecurity rates have started to decline, but remain far above pre-COVID levels. In the most recently available data from the Census Bureau covering April 28 through May 10, 2021, about 16.6 percent of households were food-insecure, and about 22 percent of households with children were food-insecure. Food insecurity among female-headed households and among Black and Hispanic families with children remain notably elevated over the average.

Parents will go to great lengths to protect their children from experiencing hunger. It is an urgent matter of national concern that parents are reporting that it is sometimes or often the case that: “the children in my household were not eating enough because we just couldn’t afford enough food” at rates far exceeding past precedent by more than ten percent.

The food insecurity patterns we observe today will not only affect well-being and economic security in the short-term, but will reverberate for decades to come. Encouragingly, research evidence, including from the past year, suggests that providing additional nutrition assistance can counteract some of the rise in food insecurity.

SNAP provides insurance protection to those who are experiencing poor economic outcomes and supports those who are trying to improve their situation by leveraging powerful forces, public investment in the private-sector, and choice. Evidence shows that SNAP reduces food insecurity, increases health and economic security, including economic self-sufficiency, and that we all benefit from its effects on the economy. Bipartisan support for emergency allotments, the SNAP maximum benefit increase, and Pandemic EBT, among others, has been critical in helping families put food on the table this past year.

Although SNAP is already a highly effective program, there are modest but important steps that Congress can take to improve it as we look to the future. These reforms include automatically increasing benefit levels and ensuring that the program expands during a recession, adopting a timely and efficient process for waiving or ending SNAP work requirements, and adjusting the SNAP benefit formula to increase benefit adequacy and support work.

While the COVID-19 recession is ongoing, SNAP is an integral part of the economic recovery. To augment work incentives in the SNAP Program rules, Congress could increase the earnings disregard, increase the value of the EITC for childless adults, and add a basic needs allowance, all of which would increase food security among workers, servicemembers, and their families.

Tying in a nationwide work requirement suspension to the HHS emergency declaration remains good policy, yet well-designed studies of SNAP work requirements do not show that they increase labor force participation, even during an economic expansion. In fact, they penalize workers and those who face meaningful barriers to consistent employment. Easing administrative burdens and tying a SNAP maximum benefit increase to economic indicators that signal a recession has started will help our country be better prepared to fight the next recession. The value of the SNAP maximum benefit is not sufficient, and SNAP purchasing power has de-

creased even more since the onset of the COVID–19 pandemic. To reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition, benefit calculations and allowable purchases need modernization.

I believe that ending hunger in America is possible, and that it starts with SNAP. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Bauer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LAUREN LOWENSTEIN BAUER, PH.D., FELLOW IN ECONOMIC STUDIES, THE HAMILTON PROJECT, BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee this afternoon.

My name is Dr. Lauren Lowenstein Bauer, and I am a Fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution where I am affiliated with The Hamilton Project. I conduct research on issues of economic and public concern, including human capital development and safety net programs. One of my areas of expertise is Federal nutrition assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; formerly known as the Food Stamp Program).

In my testimony today I will describe the state of food insecurity in the United States, assess how Federal nutrition assistance programs have supported families and the economy over the past year, and apply evidence toward making recommendations on the future of SNAP.

Food insecurity, especially when experienced by children, has been an acute and persistent problem in the United States over the past year. Congress took vitally important action centered on enhancing SNAP and providing resources to purchase food to families with children, which prevented even greater hardship. Although SNAP is already a highly effective program, there are modest but important steps that Congress can take to improve the program. These reforms include (i) automatically increasing benefits levels and ensuring that the program expands during a recession, (ii) adopting a timely and efficient process for waiving or ending SNAP work requirements, and (iii) adjusting the SNAP benefit formula to increase benefit adequacy and support work.

#### **Food Insecurity During the COVID–19 pandemic**

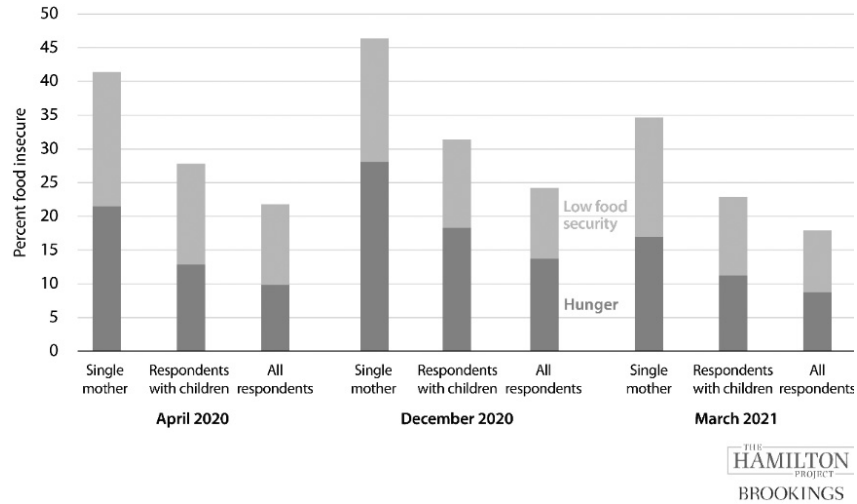
Food insecurity increases during economic downturns and tend to remain elevated long after the official end to a recession because the economic recovery of low-income households typically lags higher-income groups. Prior to the COVID–19 pandemic, about 11 percent of households were food-insecure and about four percent of households reported very low food security in 2019.<sup>i</sup>

Early in the pandemic, nationally representative surveys consistently found overall rates of household food insecurity above 20 percent and that more than one in three households with children were experiencing food insecurity. In fact, during the course of 2020, food insecurity rates remained elevated, peaking for most groups in December 2020. These elevated levels are illustrative of how food insecurity has been a crisis within the larger crisis of the COVID–19 pandemic.<sup>ii</sup> Starting in January 2021, food insecurity rates started to decline but remain far above pre-COVID levels. In the most recently available data from the Census Household Pulse Survey, fielded from April 28 to May 10, 2021, about 16.6 percent of households were food-insecure and about 22 percent of households with children were food-insecure.<sup>iii</sup>

Nevertheless, families with children, and specifically single mother households, have experienced especially high levels of material hardship over the past year. *Figure 1* shows the share of adult respondents to the Census Household Pulse Survey who reported food insecurity at key points over the past year, divided by hunger (very low food security) and low food security. As of late March 2021, single mothers had a higher rate of food insecurity (almost 35 percent) than respondents with children or all households had at any point during the pandemic.

**Figure 1**

**Food Insecurity Among Different Types of Families, April 2020, December 2020, March 2021**



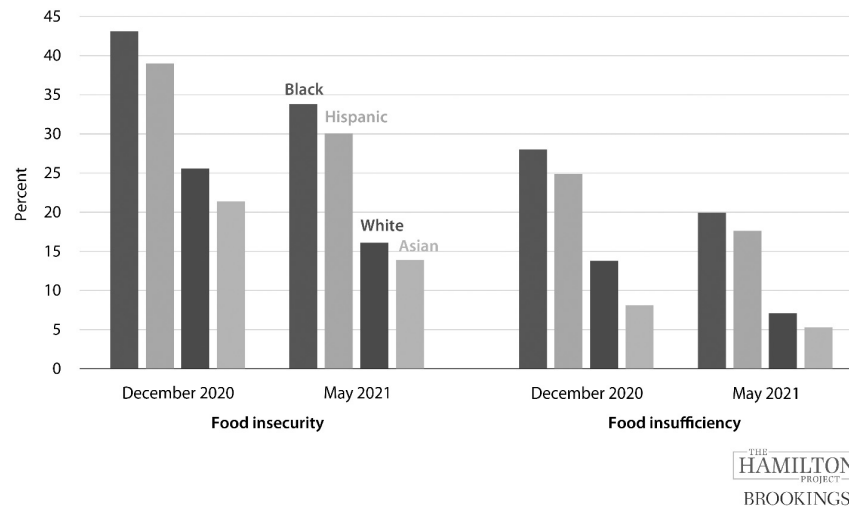
Source: Pitts and Schanzenbach 2021 (Census Household Pulse Survey; Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement); correspondence with author.

Note: Household Pulse Survey weeks 1, 21, and 27 are shown. For additional details, please see the Pitts and Schanzenbach 2020.

Rates of food insecurity and insufficiency (reporting sometimes or often not having enough food) also have been particularly elevated among Black and Hispanic families with children (*figure 2*). While rates of food insecurity and food insufficiency are substantially lower for all groups in May 2021 relative to December 2020, they are still about double among Black and Hispanic families with children over white families with children.

**Figure 2**

**Food Insecurity and Insufficiency, by Race, December 2020 and May 2021**



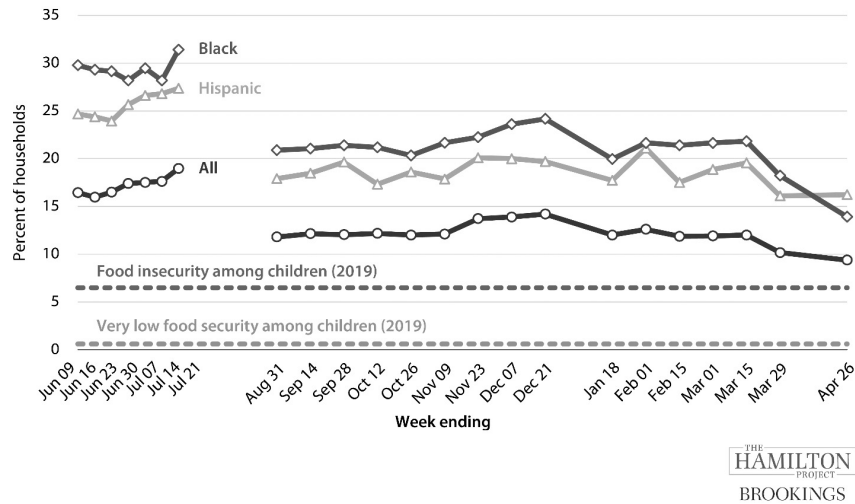
Source: Schanzenbach 2021.

Note: For additional details on the conversation to food insecurity from the Census Household Pulse, please see the appendix to Bauer, *et al.*, 2020.

Food insecurity affects the entire household but within food-insecure households, adults will go to great lengths to protect their children from experiencing hunger.<sup>iv</sup> Over the past year, there is evidence of a substantial increase in the food insecurity of children.<sup>v</sup> Figure 3 shows the share of parents (all, Black, and Hispanic) who responded that it was sometime or often the case that in the past week “the children in my household were not eating enough because we just couldn’t afford enough food.” As illustrated in the figure below, this marks a significant increase from 2019 annual rates, whether food insecurity or very low food security among children (dashed lines).

**Figure 3**

**Food Insecurity Among Children, by Race, 2020–2021**



Source: USDA (2020); Census Household Pulse Survey (2020–21).

Note: The Census Household Pulse survey asks: “Please indicate whether the next statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true in the last 7 days for the children living in your household who are under 18 years old: ‘The children were not eating enough because we just couldn’t afford enough food.’”

Elevated rates of food insecurity are associated with worse contemporaneous health and academic outcomes and indicate that a household is facing more general economic challenges; in the long term, children’s exposure to adverse economic shocks has persistent negative health and economic consequences.<sup>vi</sup> Therefore, the food insecurity patterns we observe today will not only affect well-being and economic security in the short-term, but will reverberate for decades to come. Encouragingly, research evidence, including from the past year, suggests that providing additional nutrition assistance can counteract some of the rise in food insecurity.

**The Importance of Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs to the Economy**

The goals of safety net programs are to provide insurance protection to those who are experiencing poor economic outcomes and to support those who are trying to improve their situation. SNAP achieves these goals by leveraging powerful forces—public investment, the private-sector, and choice—to ensure that eligible participants and families have food when they have no or low income. Evidence shows that SNAP reduces food insecurity, increases health and economic security among families in the short term, economic self-sufficiency in the long term, and that we all benefit from its effect on the economy.<sup>viii</sup>

Food insecurity and economic hardship typically increase in recessions and decrease in economic expansions. The safety net plays an important role in mitigating the negative effects in recessions, partly by automatically expanding during eco-

conomic downturns as income-based eligibility for safety net programs increases, and partly through Congressional actions that increase the generosity of and eligibility for safety net programs.<sup>vii</sup>

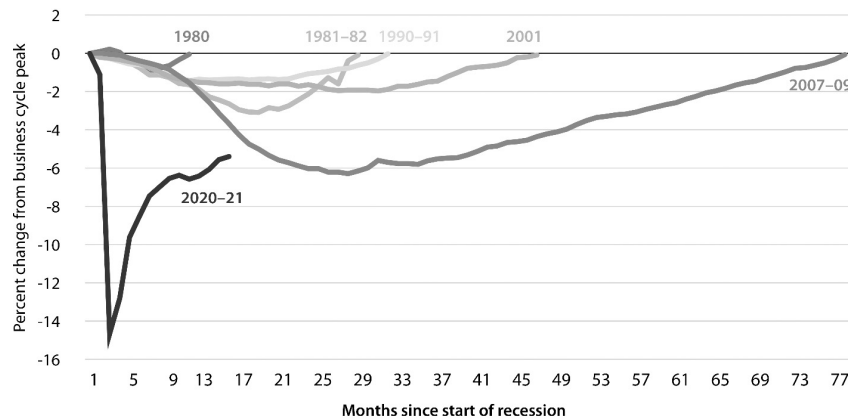
Congress has a track record of taking action to preserve and improve SNAP's ability to turn the tide on economic downturns. During the Great Recession, the statutory increase to the SNAP maximum benefit reduced food insecurity and improved economic conditions within the household, keeping a million people out of poverty in 2010.<sup>viii</sup> Studies show that when SNAP payments increase to a local area in response to an economic downturn, they serve as stimulus; for example, every \$1.00 in new SNAP benefits spurred \$1.74 in economic activity in the first quarter of 2009, and spurred \$1.22 even as late as the first quarter of 2015. Indeed, additional SNAP benefits had the highest multiplier of any of the policies adopted during the Great Recession.<sup>ix</sup>

#### COVID-19 Recession and Congressional Response

It is difficult to overstate the extent of economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The onset of the COVID-19 recession was swifter and the nadir deeper than the Great Recession.<sup>x</sup> *Figure 4* shows the percent change in employment relative to business cycle peaks. Job losses resulting from COVID-19 wiped out 113 straight months of job growth, with total non-farm employment falling by 20.5 million jobs in April 2020.<sup>xi</sup> Based on the most recent employment report, employment is still more than five percent below its February 2020 level. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic shutdown affected all workers, but the impact was harshest for women, non-white workers, lower-wage earners, and those with less education.<sup>xii</sup>

**Figure 4**

**Percent Change in Employment Relative to Business Cycle Peak, by Business Cycle, 1980–2020**



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Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLIS) 1990–2020; National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) n.d.; authors' calculations.

Note: Figure shows the percent change in total non-farm employment from the peak of a business cycle until employment returns to the level of the previous business cycle peak.

Deteriorating economic conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have made it even more difficult for many low-income households, including those with children, to afford groceries. Families responded to these challenges by relying on community resources and safety net programs.

Food banks have reported consistent increases in demand throughout 2020, with more people availing themselves of food pantries or receiving other forms of direct food assistance from a community or religious organization than at any point since at least 2014.<sup>xiii</sup> Reported use of charitable food increased 50 percent between December 2019 and December 2020; in December 2020, 20 percent of adults reported



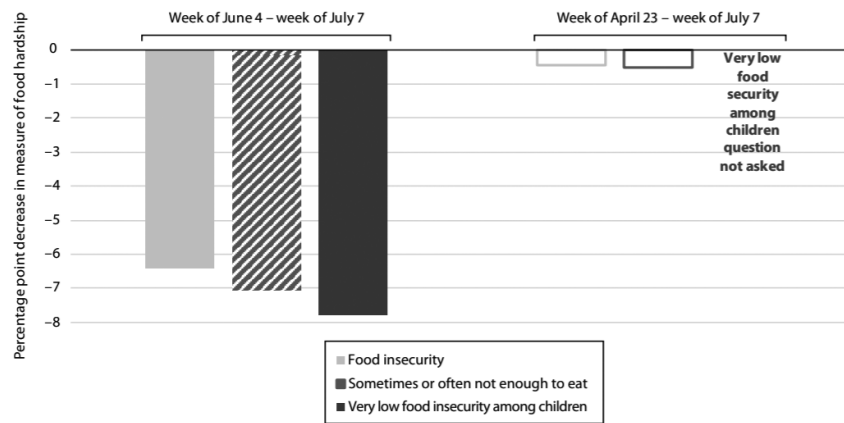
that in the past year their household had received charitable food.<sup>xiv</sup> Charitable food assistance has helped families during the COVID-19 recession, but these alternative sources of food are not adequate to meet demand.<sup>xv</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated recession have led, both automatically and through Congressional and Executive action, to an expansion in eligibility for and generosity of nutrition assistance programs in the United States. Through SNAP, additional resources for existing programs including SNAP, WIC, child nutrition programs (National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Summer Food Service Program), and new programs like Pandemic EBT and Farmers to Families boxes, Congress has supported millions of eligible households with vouchers to purchase food as well as commodities and meals.

In addition to taking action to increase SNAP enrollment during the course of the past year, Congress authorized two pieces of legislation that increased the value of SNAP benefits: SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs; beginning April 2020) and a 15 percent SNAP maximum benefit increase (beginning January 2021). The maximum benefit increase affected the benefit generosity for all participating households; until last month, only households not receiving the SNAP maximum benefit were eligible for EAs. In combination, these additional resources prevented greater food hardship than otherwise would have been experienced over the course of the past year and allowed families to use their non-SNAP financial resources on other necessities.

Because school meal programs are integral to addressing child food insecurity in the United States, many entities, including Congress, the USDA, states, and schools, took action in response to COVID-19-related school closures to reconstitute the food safety net for children. My colleagues and I (Abigail Pitts, Krista Ruffini, and Diane Schanzenbach) evaluated the impact of one of the planks: the initial roll-out of Pandemic EBT during the summer of 2020.<sup>xvi</sup> As shown in *figure 5*, during the first week after Pandemic EBT benefits are paid, the rate of children not getting enough to eat declines by about 8 percentage points (30 percent). Evidence of the effect of Pandemic EBT during its rollout in the summer of 2020 is consistent with prior evidence on the effect of Summer EBT.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Figure 5**  
**Effect of Pandemic on Measures of Food Hardship**



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Source: Census Household Pulse Survey 2020; Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement 2008, 2018; authors' calculations.

Note: Hollow bars indicate results that are not statistically significant at the ten percent level. The striped bar indicates results are significant at the ten percent level. Solid bars indicate results are significant at the one or five percent level. Please refer to the technical appendix for additional details.

While the COVID-19 recession is ongoing, SNAP is an integral part of the economic recovery. SNAP is designed to support work and to ensure food consumption during spells of unemployment or when a person is unable to work or work consist-

ently. SNAP addresses work disincentives through an earnings disregard of 20 percent and a gradual benefit reduction schedule. This means that when a person moves from being a labor force nonparticipant to working while on SNAP, total household resources will increase; as a beneficiary's earnings approach the eligibility threshold, total household resources continue to increase.<sup>xviii</sup>

Work requirements in SNAP are intended to increase labor force participation and hours worked among program participants. However, evidence suggest that SNAP work requirements do not increase employment and penalize workers who are eligible for SNAP. During the Food Stamp Program's introduction in the 1960s and 1970s, reductions in employment and hours worked were observed, particularly among female-headed households.<sup>xix</sup> But in general and in the modern era, there is little evidence that SNAP receipt itself depresses work effort.<sup>xx</sup>

Work requirements make SNAP a less-effective automatic stabilizer by preventing newly eligible people from maintaining access to the program during economic downturns.<sup>xxi</sup> The law provides for a safety valve—work requirement waivers—that allows states to apply for exemptions where there is evidence of a lack of sufficient jobs. These standing criteria have not substituted for Congressional action; during both the Great Recession and the COVID-19 Recession, Congress acted to suspend SNAP work requirements nationwide.

### **Reforms to Improve Countercyclicity in SNAP**

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hilary Hoynes (University of California—Berkeley) and Diane Schanzenbach (Northwestern University) proposed policies to leverage SNAP to counter economic downturns. In their piece, they argue for tying a 15 percent maximum benefit increase and a nationwide work requirement suspension to economic indicators that signal a recession has started.<sup>xxii</sup> This proposal provides a base for reforms to improve the countercyclicity of SNAP, in addition to codifying some of the measures that Congress took over the past year.

In response to pandemic conditions, USDA approved state waivers to extend certification periods, reduce paperwork and interview burdens, and allow for telephonic signatures—all of which made it easier for eligible individuals to enroll in and stay on SNAP.<sup>xxiii</sup> While easing administrative barriers should be a part of reform more generally, it is particularly important to put in place mechanisms to do so automatically when the economy is contracting and the rolls of means-tested programs should expand. In December 2020, income from Unemployment Insurance became newly disregarded as part of the SNAP benefit calculation. Given evidence that SNAP participation increases when households lose jobs and income and decreases as participants earn more, extending this provision would provide greater public insurance to workers.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### **Reforms to Promote Work in SNAP**

To augment work incentives in the SNAP program rules, Congress could increase the earnings disregard. This would provide a larger incentive to program participants to work and earn more. A Hamilton Project proposal from Diane Schanzenbach (Northwestern University) recommends increasing the earnings disregard to 30 percent.<sup>xxv</sup> Similarly, military families should not be prevented from accessing SNAP because of the ways in which their work is compensated; a basic needs allowance is a sensible solution to increase food security among servicemembers and their families.

Another way to increase work incentives in SNAP is to increase the value of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for childless adults. Prior to the American Rescue Plan (ARP), the EITC for households with no children was about \$540. The ARP increased the value of the EITC for this group to about \$1,500 and expanded who qualified. The EITC is pro-work on its own and would make SNAP more pro-work because EITC is not counted in the SNAP benefit formula.

SNAP's fundamental role as an automatic stabilizer and safety net should guide reform. I do not believe that there is evidence to justify time limits on SNAP program participation, in good economic times or ill; SNAP work requirements should be eliminated. In the event of their continuation, work requirement waivers should be tied to additional responsive economic triggers and SNAP Employment and Training slots should be more widely available.

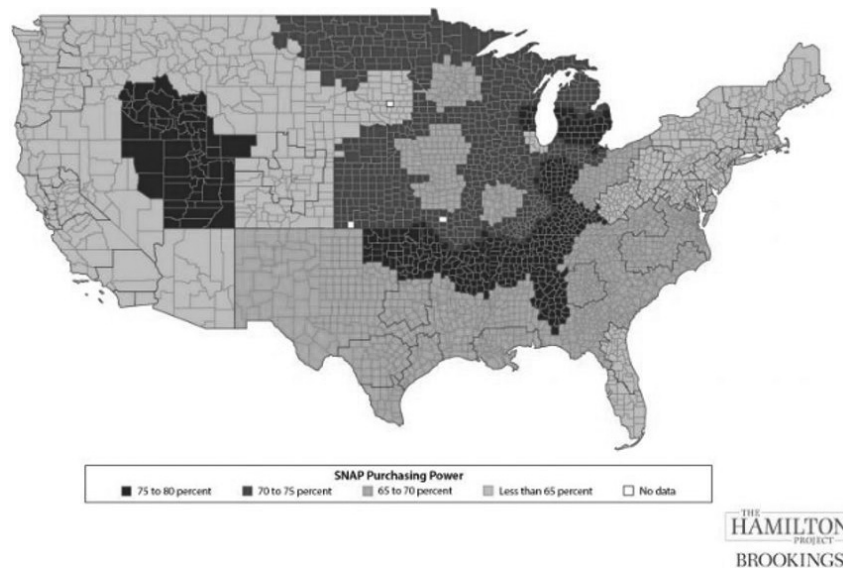
### **Addressing Food Insecurity through SNAP**

The value of SNAP benefits that a household receives are the function of three factors: how much USDA determines it minimally costs to achieve a healthy diet, *i.e.*, The Thrifty Food Plan (the Thrifty), how much money a household has available to purchase groceries, and what share of that available money does the government expect a household to spend on groceries. Because households who have no re-

sources to contribute to the purchase of groceries receive the maximum benefit, the purchasing power of the Thrifty should meet their food needs.

The value of the SNAP maximum benefit is not sufficient to provide adequate nutrition assistance for eligible households. The value of the Thrifty varies widely across different locations; in no market area does SNAP purchasing power cover more than 80 percent of the price of the Thrifty and in high cost areas, it covers less than 65 percent (*figure 6*).<sup>xxvi</sup> But even in more local areas with lower relative food costs to others, the Thrifty is not adequate: in 2018, the SNAP maximum benefit per meal did not cover the cost of a Thrifty-tied meal in 99 percent of counties in the U.S.<sup>xxvii</sup> In places with higher food prices, rates of household, adult, and child food insecurity are higher.<sup>xxviii</sup>

**Figure 6**  
**SNAP Purchasing Power by Market Group, 2020**



Source: Bronchetti, Christensen, and Hoynes 2018.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that SNAP purchasing power has decreased even more since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher food prices, increasing demand for food to be prepared at home and shelf-stable nutritious foods, competition among retailers and food banks, reduced low-price food given demand, day-over-day disruptions that result in empty shelves, and restricted ability to comparison shop all contribute to lower SNAP purchasing power and exacerbate even further the inadequacy of the maximum SNAP benefit.<sup>xxix</sup> This contributes to rising food insecurity and household financial instability, which have detrimental near- and long-term effects.

#### **Reforms to Address SNAP Benefit Adequacy**

In order to increase the adequacy of SNAP benefits for participating households to reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition, benefit calculations and allowable purchases need modernization. For The Hamilton Project, James Ziliak (University of Kentucky) summarized the evidence and proposed mechanisms for updating the calculation of the Thrifty Food Plan, focusing on accounting for the cost of time.<sup>xxx</sup> There are additional levers throughout the benefit formula and through the calculation of the Thrifty itself that would more closely align benefits with the needs of families. While additional benefits alone spur the purchase of healthy foods, direct incentives to purchase fruits and vegetables and allowing for the purchase of certain low-cost, high-value hot items (like rotisserie chickens) would reduce food insecurity and improve diet quality.<sup>xxxi</sup>

The fact that many who receive benefits remain food-insecure does not imply that the programs are ineffective, as families most in need of food assistance are most likely to enroll in nutrition programs. I believe that that ending hunger in America

is possible—and it starts with increasing SNAP purchasing power. While the Thrifty was previously recalculated infrequently and on an *ad hoc* basis, Congress now mandates regular updates to the Thrifty Food Plan: every 5 years starting in 2022. I understand that USDA is currently in the process of responding to this Congressional mandate.

To reduce food insecurity and support America’s economic recovery, sensible reforms to SNAP include (i) automatically increasing benefits levels and ensuring that the program expands during a recession, (ii) adopting a timely and efficient process for waiving or ending SNAP work requirements, and (iii) adjusting the SNAP benefit formula to increase benefit adequacy and support work.

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<sup>iii</sup> The Census Household Pulse Survey (HPS) asks respondents whether, in the past 7 days, its household was able to consume the quantity and types of food it wanted; was able to consume enough, but not of the type of food it wanted; sometimes was not able to eat enough; or often was not able to eat enough. This question is identical to that asked in the Current Population Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS, December supplement). Since the HPS does not ask the full battery of food security questions, Schanzenbach and Pitts map CPS-FSS food insufficiency and food insecurity to the HPS food insufficiency question, following the approach in Bitler, *et al.* (2020). They take the CPS-FSS from 2015 through 2019 and calculate the share of food-insecure households (overall, with children, single mothers) in each food insufficiency category by state, then multiply these rates for the HPS responses in order to obtain a state-by-week level measure of food insecurity. As shown in Bitler, *et al.* (2020), 92 percent of the increase in household food insecurity from pre-COVID to transformed food insecurity post-COVID can be explained by an increase in unemployed, while only 65 percent of the increase in household food insecurity among households with children can be similarly explained. Their work both validates the technique of transforming the HPS questions into the food insecurity concept and affirms that the loss of school meals and disproportionate loss of employment among women explain a higher share of elevated food insecurity among these families. Bitler, Marianne P., Hilary W. Hoynes, and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach. 2020. “The Social Safety Net in the Wake of COVID-19.” Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.; Schanzenbach, Diane, and Abigail Pitts. 2020. “How Much Has Food Insecurity Risen? Evidence from the Census Household Pulse Survey.” Institute for Policy Rapid Research Report, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.

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The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Dr. Bauer.

Our next witness, Ms. Davis, please begin when you are ready with your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF ODESSA DAVIS, WASHINGTON, D.C.; ON BEHALF OF NO KID HUNGRY CAMPAIGN, SHARE OUR STRENGTH**

Ms. DAVIS. Good afternoon. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to be here today. My name is Odessa Davis. I am a mom, a college student, a hunger advocate with Share Our Strength and Manna Food Center. I am here to speak on the importance of nutrition programs like SNAP and school meals.

Before the pandemic, my dream was to become a chef. I got my associate's degree at Le Cordon Bleu, Miami. During that time, I had a beautiful baby boy and became a single mom. I had to work minimum wage and I needed government assistance. I had to put my pride to the side to get the assistance that I needed. I got SNAP, which helped me pay my bills and decrease my stress. My son received Medicaid and free breakfast and lunch at school. This helped my son stay focused on his schoolwork.

I wanted a better life for my son, so I updated my dream to become a multi-business owner, including a restaurant. I started working for Montgomery County Public Schools as a special ed para-educator. Doing that, I updated my SNAP information, which means that by working hard, my SNAP decreased. Later, my SNAP was cut-off and I was on the benefit cliff. Even though my job was 10 months, I had to work four jobs. My son ended up getting free breakfast and reduced lunch.

I went back to school to get my associate's degree in business management, thanks to my support system from scholarships, family, friends, and coworkers. I wouldn't have done it without them. A lot of people do not have that support. During school, I met other moms in the same situation. I started a support group called Back on Track. Fifty percent of my members graduated.

During COVID, it became more stressful. Three of my jobs were closed because of COVID. I had to use my savings and I was denied unemployment because my 10 month job was considered a full-time

job, even though I don't get paid during summertime, winter break, spring break, or professional days.

But there was a light at the end of the tunnel. I did receive the P-EBT card, and that helped me be able to pay for nutritious foods such as meat and veggies. I also received food from the food pantry, and I started volunteering to cook food for my friends and family that were not qualified for SNAP. So, when they got food from food pantries, I made it for them because they can't cook.

I did graduate during the pandemic, May 2020, from Montgomery College and got my associate's degree in business management with honors.

As you can see, nutrition programs such as SNAP and school meals are really helpful, and decrease our stress to not have to worry about food, and be able to pay for our bills.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Davis follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ODESSA DAVIS, WASHINGTON, D.C.; ON BEHALF OF NO KID HUNGRY CAMPAIGN, SHARE OUR STRENGTH

Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and Members of the Committee, thank you for convening this important conversation and for providing me with the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Odessa Davis and I am a mom, a college student, special education para-educator and hunger advocate with Share Our Strength and the Manna Food Center in Montgomery County, Maryland.

I am so glad this hearing is focused on the challenges women face in trying to make ends meet and put food on the table for their families. As you work to improve access to important nutrition programs like SNAP and school meals, I'd like to share my story to help you understand how important the investments you make in these vital programs are to improving the lives of families like mine in every community around the country.

I have always believed in the importance of working hard to achieve your dreams. After high school, I graduated from Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Miami. I then returned to Maryland with my son to pursue a degree in Business Management at Montgomery College. With help from scholarships and a supportive family and friend network, I recently earned my Associates Degree, graduating with honors! This fall, I will be starting at the UMD Global Campus.

To make ends meet during school, I worked as many as four jobs, including as a special education para-educator with Montgomery County Public Schools. But even before the pandemic, it was hard to make ends meet. My job with the school system only pays when school is in session, meaning there is no income during the summer months, over winter and spring breaks, or on other days when the schools are closed. So, I was also working as a contractor for the school's sports league and at a summer job with Montgomery County Recreation Therapeutics—both of which were eliminated due to COVID-19.

Prior to the pandemic, my son and I were financially limited, and, even watching every penny, there never seemed to be enough to go around. There were so many months when I had to make tough choices. How was I going to buy enough food and pay the light bill? Put gas in the car or get groceries? These are the questions that face so many families like mine and the financial strain got even tighter once COVID hit.

These challenges and difficult decisions don't just affect me, I also have my 11 year old son to think about. Many of you here today are parents, so you understand that, as a mom, I want to build a strong, healthy and successful life for him. I want him to get the food he needs—every single day—so he can focus and learn, so he can stay healthy and happy.

Programs like SNAP and school meals made it possible for me to keep food on the table. But we need to make sure these programs work together and work effectively. **Strengthening all of the Federal nutrition programs is essential because they work together to reach families with kids of all ages where they live and learn.**

Before the pandemic, my son participated in the free and reduced-price meal program at school, which was a huge relief—knowing he was getting the nutrition he needed to focus and learn. For a while, we were also receiving support from SNAP

each month, but we lost those benefits once my earnings increased just over the threshold for the two of us. Once you factor in rent, the electric bill, gas for the car, water bill, and all the things that seem to pop up like medicine, car repairs, replacing a pair of shoes my son grew out of, there just isn't much left for food.

Then the pandemic hit and times got really tough for us. My jobs with school sports and the Parks & Rec department were canceled due to new safety measures. It then took me nearly a year to get unemployment benefits—our state's unemployment system is outdated and makes it more complicated to show income loss with multiple low-wage jobs.

And not only did I lose income, when schools closed, my son also lost access to the school meals that had been such a vital source of nutrition during the school year. While his school still offered meals, they were only distributed in the middle of the day, while he was in virtual school. I tried to pick them up when I could, but our schedules made it really hard to ensure that he was those nutritious meals on a consistent basis.

When Pandemic EBT rolled out, it was a life saver. This benefit put \$5 a day onto a grocery benefit card so I could buy more of the food my son needed, when he needed it. P-EBT really helped me put food on the table during the height of the pandemic, but, when that benefit ended in November, things got really hard. I ran through the small savings that I had worked so hard to build, and we, like so many other Americans, relied on food pantries to make sure we had enough to eat.

The increased struggle to make ends meet and provide for our small family due to COVID-19 is not unique, nor are the challenges that we faced before the pandemic. I am talking to you today, but I know dozens of women, just like me, who have their own stories to tell. Parents who are working multiple jobs, pursuing an education and raising families, all while under extreme financial strain. We are stretching every penny to provide for their families, but can use some help to make it through.

That is why programs like school meals and SNAP are so important. Knowing that our kids are getting the food they need, allows us to focus on climbing out of these hard times and, once we do, we can give a hand to others.

When I was at Montgomery College, I started a club called "Back on Track." It was a small group of adult students who were facing similar financial challenges. We worked hard to support one another and to help each other navigate the programs that could help. This year, 50% of our group was successful in graduating.

Today, along with my job with the school system, I'm working for the Community Action Agency and using my culinary skills as a volunteer chef, preparing food for people who are also facing tough times.

Thank you for allowing me to meet with you today and I hope my story helps you to better understand the importance of nutrition programs in the everyday lives of families across the country. I am grateful for our time together.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Ms. Davis, for your testimony today.

Our next witness, Dr. Whitford, please begin your testimony when you are ready.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES WHITFORD, D.P.T., CO-FOUNDER AND  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WATERED GARDENS MINISTRIES,  
JOPLIN, MO**

Dr. WHITFORD. Good afternoon, Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and the Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

About 25 years ago, I was serving at a homeless mission in Ft. Worth, Texas, and my heart broke as I engaged men, women and children living on the streets. Not long after that, I met my beautiful bride, Marsha, and we married in the chapel of that same mission with homeless as our guests. Three months after that, we opened the doors to our own small, compassion-driven ministry called Watered Gardens in the southwest Missouri community of Joplin.

About 20 years later, our ministry is the largest privately funded poverty-fighting organization in our four-state area. We meet tens



of thousands of needs every year, helping both the poor and homeless with everything from emergency shelter to workforce development.

Now, I said we help them, but really, they help themselves through a unique ministry we operate called the Worth Shop. We call it the Worth Shop because we found that work awakens worth in people's lives. It is a place where people can trade their time to earn everything they need, from clothing, to shelter, or furniture, or food.

Just last week I sat across from Hope in our Worth Shop, a young woman who was earning her food. I asked her, Hope, why do you earn your food here instead of going to get it for free from somewhere else? She said I like it this way. I feel better about myself.

Now, I have heard countless comments like that over the years. One man said, "You take the shame out of the game." One lady named Beth, who was earning her food by knitting stocking caps for newborns in the local hospital, called me later and left a voice message that said thank you for treating me as equal.

Now beyond anecdotes, research bears this out also. The AMERICAN JOURNAL OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY published a paper in 2015 titled, *Personality Change Following Unemployment*, a study of 6,000 unemployed adults. They discovered the longer people are without work, the more they suffer. Specifically, they found a decline in three psychosocial metrics: agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. In other words, people become disheartened and grumpy when they are not working.

So, if we want to really help energize people to get back in the workforce, then we should couple our charity with an expectation to be productive, because people feel better about themselves when dignity is restored. We do this at our mission every day, viewing people who many call poor and needy as people who also have great potential, capacity, and ability.

April was one of those. When she first stepped into our doors, she was homeless, addicted, and had lost her kids. She was on SNAP and had been in and out of HUD housing, but it was at the mission surrounded by people who cared for her that she found the courage to get clean, get a job, and turn in her SNAP card. She said that last part was the one of the hardest things she had ever done because she had never known that she had the ability to provide for herself. But with a compassionate support team, she did it. Not only that, but she got her kids back, went back to school, and then she ended up working full-time as our office manager.

I have a lot of other first-hand stories of people finding freedom from dependency simply because we viewed them as unique individuals with unique gifts rather than charity cases intended to be stuck on the receiving end of someone's benevolence.

Unfortunately, I have no shortage of stories that go in a different direction. Kenny, who was horribly addicted to alcohol, would stand on the median with a cardboard sign that read Food Stamps half price, just to get another drink.

Now, the right kind of help, rehabilitation and development, they are available for guys like Kenny, but for him and countless others,

means-tested welfare programs disincentivize work that would otherwise lead to a flourishing life.

James Madison, debating on the floor of the House in 1794, asserted: "Charity is no part of the duty of government." Twenty-one years later, that makes sense to me. The government doesn't know, Kenny, April, Beth, or Hope. I know them. And without a personal knowledge of each individual and what is really going on in their lives, needs cannot be met in a way that doesn't trap people in dependency and strip them of dignity.

Charity has never been administered well from the government. FDR himself admitted this in his 1935 State of the Union Address. After comparing dependency on relief as a narcotic, he went on to promise, "The Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief." That was sound conviction because although the government might be able to feed people, it can never give those struggling in poverty what justice demands, dignity and friendship. That comes by way of compassionate neighbors like the ones who volunteer at my mission who also develop vital relationships with those who come for food.

So, I implore this Committee, please, consider what you can do to safeguard the future of those vital relationships that are certainly undermined or crowded out when food simply comes on a card with nothing required.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Whitford follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES WHITFORD, D.P.T., CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR, WATERED GARDENS MINISTRIES, JOPLIN, MO

Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and the Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for receiving my written testimony today regarding the SNAP program.

About 25 years ago, I was impacted significantly while serving at a homeless mission in Ft. Worth, Texas. I felt like my heart literally broke as I engaged men, women and children living on the streets. Not long after that, I met my beautiful bride and we married in the chapel of that same mission, the homeless as our witnesses. Three months later we opened the doors to our own compassion-driven ministry called Watered Gardens in our SW Missouri community of Joplin.

After the first year of operation, we made the difficult decision of reducing my full-time work as a physical therapist to part-time. This was a sacrifice for us and our five children, but it was evident the ministry needed more of my attention. My wife and I worked hard to build a team of compassionate volunteers and for the next 9 years it remained completely volunteer driven with no payroll at all.

But the sacrifice paid off.

The ministry is now the largest privately funded poverty-fighting organization in our four-state area. Today, we serve both the poor and the homeless, offering 105 beds in three facilities serving those in long term recovery, adult men and women in need of emergency shelter, homeless moms with children and we have a respite unit for those discharged from the hospital who have nowhere to go to finish their recovery. Our non-homeless services include workforce development, education, and meeting basic needs like furniture, appliances, clothing and food. We served more than 60,000 meals last year and from our Mission Market we helped nearly 400 families with more than 57,000 pounds of food for their homes through private donations. I say, "We helped them," but really, they helped themselves through a unique ministry we operate called the Worth Shop. We call it a Worth Shop because we have found that work awakens worth in people's lives. It is a place where people can trade their time to earn everything from clothing and shelter to furniture or food. Work is dignifying whether it's through helping in the recycling section of our Worth Shop or staining and sewing together beautiful leather journals.

Just last week I sat across from Hope in our Worth Shop, a young woman who was earning her food. I asked her, “Hope, why do you earn your food here instead of going to get it for free from somewhere else.”

“I like it this way,” she said. “I feel better about myself.”

I’ve heard countless comments like that over the years. One man said, “You take the shame out of the game.” Another person said, “It’s like we get to keep our dignity.” One lady named Beth who was earning her food by knitting stocking caps for newborns in the local hospital called me later and left a voice message that said, “Thank you for treating me as equal.”

These are more than just anecdotal stories. Research also bears this out. The *American Journal of Applied Psychology* published a paper in 2015 “Personality Change Following Unemployment,” a study of 6,000 unemployed, subsidized adults.<sup>1</sup> They discovered the longer people are without work, the more they suffer. Specifically, there was statistically significant decline in three of five psychosocial metrics: agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. In other words, people become disheartened and grumpy when they’re not working.

So, if we want to help energize people to get back in the workforce, then we should couple our charity with an expectation to be productive—they’ll feel better about themselves as dignity is restored.

We do this at our mission every day, viewing people who many call poor and needy as people who also have great potential, capacity and ability.

April was one of those people. When she first stepped into the doors of our mission, she was homeless, addicted and had lost her children. She was on SNAP and had been in and out of HUD housing, but it was at the mission surrounded by people who cared for her—willing to develop a relationship with her—that she found the courage to get clean, get a job and turn in her SNAP card. She said that was the one of the scariest things she ever did because she simply had never known that she had the ability to provide for herself. But with a compassionate support-team who esteemed her as able, she did it. Not only that, but she got her kids back, went back to school and ended up working as our office manager before opening and leading her own recovery ministry where *she* now inspires women to discover their God-given potential.

I’ll never forget Mike, a middle-aged man who has a third grade education, riding his bicycle down to the mission after seeing one of our public service announcements. When I greeted him, he said, “I saw you on the TV say that the working poor are happier than the welfare poor, so I went and got a job!” He was so excited. When I asked him what he needed that day, he said he wanted to earn his food at the mission instead of using his SNAP card. That was 7 years ago and Mike still has that same job and loves it.

I have many more first-hand stories of people finding freedom from dependency simply because we viewed them as unique individuals with unique gifts rather than charity cases intended to be stuck on the receiving end of someone’s benevolence.

Unfortunately, I have no shortage of stories that go in a different direction. For us and others who operate work-oriented missions like ours, SNAP benefits are often more hurtful than helpful. Kenny, horribly addicted to alcohol, would stand on the median with a cardboard sign that read “Food Stamps ½ price.” I have recorded testimonies of others who have openly shared with me how easy and common it is to liquidate these benefits at 50¢ on the dollar.

Last week, I met with Kevin an able-bodied homeless man at our mission. He earns his bed and meals like everyone else because he can, but when I asked him about employment, he said, “No way. I can only work for cash under the table. I’m waiting on my disability.” That conversation led to SNAP. He pulled his card out and leaned across the table, “James,” he said. “They put hundreds of dollars on my card last month. I don’t even know what I’m going to do with it. I think I’m going to go buy some bulk food and give it away.” Unfortunately, I learned over the weekend that Kevin failed his drug test. He’s back out on the streets.

The right kind of help—rehabilitation and development—are available for guys like Kevin and Kenny but for them and countless others, means-tested welfare programs disincentivize work that would otherwise lead to a flourishing life.

In fact, before SNAP work requirements were waived in my state in 2016, more than 43,000 able-bodied adults were on the program not working at all. But by the end of the year, after the waiver for SNAP work requirements had been removed, that number had dropped by 85%.<sup>2</sup>

I remember that—before the new law went into effect. There was a lot of talk in the news about how people might go hungry. But when it passed, no one went hun-

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/apl-a0038647.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://thefga.org/paper/missouri-food-stamp-work-requirements/>.

gry. Why? Because on average, there was a 70% increase in earnings by those able-bodied adults on the program and the rest of it was taken up by private-sector charity.

We should never underestimate the incredible potential of civil society's response in times of need. Just this last Saturday, we recognized the 10th anniversary of an incredible disaster in my community. On May 22 of 2011 one of the most historically devastating F5 tornadoes tore through the center of our city rendering more than 7,000 people homeless in an hour and killing 161. It wasn't Federal Government relief that saved us. Caring neighbors, compassionate citizens and local leaders were involved in rescue, relief and then organized a coordinated response long before government help showed up.

James Madison, debating on the floor of the House in 1794, asserted, "Charity is no part of the legislative duty of the government." After twenty-one years of fighting poverty, that makes sense to me. The government doesn't know Kevin, Kenny, Mike, April, Beth, or Hope. I know them. And without a personal knowledge of each individual and what's really going on in their lives, needs cannot be met in a way that does not tend toward trapping people in dependency and stripping them of dignity.

Charity has never been administered well from the government. FDR himself admitted this in his 1935 State of the Union Address. After comparing dependency on relief as a narcotic—"a subtle destroyer of the human spirit," he went on to promise, "The Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief." That was sound conviction because although the government might be able to feed people, it can never give those struggling in poverty what justice demands—dignity and friendship. That comes by way of compassionate neighbors like the ones who volunteer at our mission who also develop vital relationships with those who come for food.

I implore this Committee to consider what it can do to safeguard the future of those vital relationships that are certainly undermined or crowded out when food simply comes on a card with nothing required.

JAMES WHITFORD,  
*Co-Founder, Executive Director,*  
Watered Gardens Ministries.



Raw interview with Dennis and his SNAP experience <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcOizE7xWVo>.

**Editor's note:** the video is retained in Committee file.



Kenny's cardboard sign.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, Dr. Whitford.

Now we have Dr. Boynton-Jarrett. When you are ready, please unmute and begin your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF RENÉE BOYNTON-JARRETT, M.D., Sc.D.,  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PEDIATRICS, BOSTON  
UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE; PEDIATRICIAN, BOSTON  
MEDICAL CENTER; FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
VITAL VILLAGE NETWORKS, BOSTON, MA**

Dr. BOYNTON-JARRETT. Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and distinguished Members of the Committee, good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee to provide testimony on the important role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for families and children during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. I am honored to be here.

My name is Dr. Renée Boynton-Jarrett. I am a Pediatrician at Boston Medical Center, the largest safety net hospital in New England, and Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine, a researcher on social and structural factors that impact population health, and the founding Director of Vital Village Networks. In partnership with community residents and organizations, Vital Village develops strategies to promote child well-being and advance health and educational equity through research data sharing and collective action. I am also a member of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, committed on exploring the opportunity gap for young children from birth to age 8.

As a primary care pediatrician at a safety net hospital, I know firsthand that all parents, regardless of personal resources, seek to ensure that their children have what they need to thrive. Such necessities include nutritious food, a safe and stable home, high quality childcare and education, and healthcare. We know that when children lack access to these basic necessities, even for brief periods of time, their health is jeopardized. Research consistently shows that when children live in families struggling with food insecurity, they are more likely to be in poor health, hospitalized, and at risk for developmental and learning delays. Adults and children who are food-insecure also experience increased rates of mental health issues.

However, supporting children's health and developmental goals goes well beyond ensuring that they receive proper nutrition. Parental well-being is foundational to healthy growth of children and their development, and when mothers are able to afford the basic

needs for their children and are well-supported, they are less likely to be depressed or anxious, and able to provide responsive care-giving that children need to develop healthy.

Currently, who gets help and how much help they receive from society is driven by a narrative of deservingness, yet food insecurity is distressing and painful. Children who are food-insecure experience physical, cognitive, and emotional awareness of hunger, and I ask what is our moral and ethical responsibility?

Unfortunately, due to persistent structural inequities, low wage work, and lack of high quality, affordable childcare, financial stability is out of reach for many families. Black, indigenous, Latina, and immigrant mothers in particular are disproportionately shut out of systems that promote economic advancement due to discrimination and systemic racism. Well before the pandemic, I met mothers in my clinic who worked multiple jobs, owned their own businesses, and despite their best efforts, struggled to put food on the table for their children. Parents in food-insecure households routinely make tradeoffs between food and basic necessities, such as utilities.

Due to food scarcity during the pandemic, an estimated 13 million children, or one in six, may experience food insecurity this year. Mental health issues have been climbing among those who are food-insecure, and for these families, programs like SNAP and school meals and WIC are crucial to filling the gap between insufficient incomes and the cost of raising children. SNAP is not only effective in reducing food insecurity, but improves child and maternal health outcomes.

During the pandemic, we have seen dramatic increases in food insecurity and other hardships among families, with school and childcare closures, the shuttering of businesses and service sectors that disproportionately employed women. These circumstances have placed an outsized burden of economic hardship and stress on mothers and women of color have been more profoundly impacted by these economic shocks, because they hold a higher share of low wage service industry jobs.

Expansion of SNAP and the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program passed in relief packages by Congress have been a lifeline for many families during this pandemic, but unfortunately, these are scheduled to sunset without further action. Failure to ensure the nutritional needs of children are met will exacerbate inequities in health and educational attainment. The time is now to move from short-term policy solutions to permanently expand eligibility and access to government nutrition programs. Working in partnership with families and communities to generate solutions is crucial.

As vaccination rates increase and as schools and childcare settings reopen, and as people return to work we cannot lose sight of three things. First, the longstanding structural inequities that existed before the pandemic; second, the lessons learned during the pandemic, including the essential role of partnerships with families and communities; and third, the urgent need for long-term policy solutions that respond to the realities families, women, and children face. In order to live in a country where all children have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential, we must seek to under-

stand ways in which current recovery efforts are leaving them and mothers behind.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Boynton-Jarrett follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RENÉE BOYNTON-JARRETT, M.D., SC.D., ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PEDIATRICS, BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE; PEDIATRICIAN, BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER; FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VITAL VILLAGE NETWORKS, BOSTON, MA

Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and distinguished Members of the House of Representatives Agriculture Committee, good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity for me to appear before this Committee to provide testimony on the important role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for families with children during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. I am honored to be here.

My name is Dr. Renée Boynton-Jarrett. I am a Pediatrician at Boston Medical Center, the largest safety-net hospital in New England, I am an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine, and researcher on social and structural factors that impact population health (social epidemiology). I am the Founding Director of Vital Village Networks. In partnership with community residents and organizations, Vital Village Networks develops community-based strategies to promote child well-being and advance health and educational equity through research, data sharing, and collective action. I am also a member of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) committee on Exploring the Opportunity Gap for Young Children from Birth to Age Eight.

As a primary care pediatrician at a hospital that predominantly serves low-income patients, I know firsthand, that all parents, regardless of personal resources, seek to ensure their children have what they need to thrive. Such necessities include nutritious food, a safe and stable home, high-quality child care and education, and health care. We know that when children lack access to these basic necessities—even for brief periods of time—their health is jeopardized. Research consistently shows that when children live in families struggling with food insecurity, they are more likely to be in poor health, be hospitalized, at-risk of developmental delays, and experiencing difficulties learning in school.<sup>(1, 2)</sup> Adults and children who are food-insecure experience increased rates of mental health issues.<sup>(3)</sup> Food insecurity is also associated with childhood obesity.<sup>(4-6)</sup>

However, supporting children's health and development goes well-beyond ensuring that children receive proper nutrition. Parental well-being is a foundation of healthy child growth and development. When mothers are able to afford basic needs for their children and are well-supported, they are less likely to be depressed or anxious.<sup>(7)</sup> As a result, mothers are better able to provide the responsive care-giving their children need early in life.<sup>(8, 9)</sup>

Currently who gets help and how much help they receive from society is driven by a narrative of deservingness.<sup>(10)</sup> Yet, food insecurity is distressing and painful—children who are in food-insecure households experience physical (hunger, fatigue), cognitive (knowledge of scarcity), and emotional awareness (worry).<sup>(11)</sup> I ask, what is our moral and ethical responsibility? During the pandemic rates of hunger and food insecurity increased, particularly among lower income, Black, Latinx and Native American households.<sup>(12, 13)</sup> However, these issues were longstanding before the pandemic and call for a paradigm shift that uses a trauma-informed approach to develop policies that promote resilient and equitable food systems in collaboration with communities and families.

Unfortunately, due to persistent structural inequities, low-wage work, and a lack of high-quality affordable child care, financial stability is out of reach for many families. Black, Indigenous, Latina, and immigrant mothers, in particular, are disproportionately shut out of systems that promote economic advancement due to prejudice, discrimination and systemic racism. Well before the pandemic, I met mothers in my clinic who worked multiple jobs or owned their own businesses and despite their best efforts struggled to put food on the table for their children. Parents in food-insecure households routinely have to make tradeoffs between food and basic necessities,<sup>(14)</sup> and over 69% report having to choose between food and utilities.<sup>(15)</sup>

Prior to the current crisis, approximately one in seven families with children nationally experienced food insecurity<sup>(16)</sup>—at Boston Medical Center, that number is closer to one in five. Due to food scarcity during the pandemic, an estimated 13 million children (or one in six children) may experience food insecurity in 2021.<sup>(16)</sup> Mental health issues also increased in relation to food insecurity during the pandemic.<sup>(17)</sup> For these families, programs like SNAP, school meals, and WIC, are cru-

cial to filling the gap between insufficient incomes and the costs of raising children. SNAP in particular is not only effective in reducing food insecurity, but also improves child and maternal health outcomes.<sup>(18)</sup> For children who receive  $\frac{2}{3}$  of their daily nutritional needs through school and childcare center meals, replacing these meals was an immediate priority but has not led to long-term policy solutions.<sup>(19)</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a dramatic increase in food insecurity and other economic hardship among families with children. School and child care closures coupled with the shuttering of businesses in service sectors that require face-to-face interaction and disproportionately employ women—these circumstances placed an outsized burden of economic hardship and stress on mothers. Women of color have been more profoundly impacted by these economic shocks because they are hold a higher share of low-wage and service industry jobs.<sup>(20)</sup> Throughout this pandemic, mothers have had to juggle remote schooling, child care responsibilities, paying bills when their incomes were cut, and ensuring that they and their children can remain healthy. Sadly, across the U.S. and in the 15 largest metropolitan areas there is a direct correlation between COVID-19 mortality rate and food insecurity among households with children under age 18. These patterns worsen among those with lower levels of education, by racial/ethnic group, and geography.<sup>(21)</sup>

Expansions in SNAP and the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program passed in relief packages by Congress have been a lifeline for many families during this pandemic. Unfortunately, these expansions are scheduled to sunset without further action. Failure to ensure the nutritional needs of children are met will exacerbate inequities in health and educational attainment. The time is now to move from a short-term policy solution to permanently expand eligibility and access to government nutrition programs. Working in partnership with families and communities to generate solutions is crucial.<sup>(22, 23)</sup>

As vaccination rates increase, as schools and child care settings reopen, and as people return to work, we cannot lose sight of three things: first, the longstanding structural inequities that existed before the pandemic; second, the lessons learned during the pandemic including the essential role of partnerships with families and communities; and, third, the urgent need for long-term policy solutions that respond to the realities of families, women, and children. In order to live in a country where all children have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential, we must seek to understand the ways in which current recovery efforts are leaving women and mothers behind. Data show women and women of color not only lost jobs at higher rates than men during the pandemic, but they are now returning to the workplace at a slower rate than men.<sup>(20)</sup> Women-owned small businesses like family home daycare centers, catering businesses, and salons suffered significant revenue loss during the pandemic. These significant declines in income that continue to persist have an impact on the well-being of children, families, and communities given the central role mothers play in the lives of others.<sup>(20)</sup> Moreover, as of December 2020, 13% of both child care centers and family child care homes remained closed.<sup>(24)</sup>

Given our understanding of the significant consequences of food insecurity and scarcity, and the fragility of our current food system, solutions to address food insecurity should employ a trauma-informed approach.<sup>(11)</sup> We urge Congress and the Administration to work alongside communities across the country to build a resilient food system that eradicates hunger, supports families and children optimally and upholds their dignity.

Increasing Federal investments into programs like SNAP and child nutrition programs not only improves health and well-being, but also helps boost local economies—supporting local farmers, small businesses, and food retailers of all sizes that accept SNAP dollars.<sup>(25)</sup> A recent analysis from the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) found that \$1 billion in new SNAP benefits would generate an additional \$32 million in income for the U.S. agriculture industry and nearly 500 full-time agricultural jobs.<sup>(26)</sup>

An equitable recovery for all will require comprehensive, family-centric policies that recognize the unique needs of mothers and children, particularly for those with low incomes. An equitable recovery, that invests in families and children, must also consider the important role child care plays in economic security and child development. Increasing SNAP benefits, improving child nutrition programs, investing in high-quality, affordable child care, improving families' ability to afford rent, ensuring access to health care and prescription medicines, increasing wages, providing paid leave, and implementing a permanent, inclusive child allowance are all evidence-based steps Congress can and should take to improve the health and well-being of women, children, and families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the urgent need to develop a resilient and secure food system based on policy and the tremendous cost for mil-



lions of American children of our failure to do so.<sup>(19)</sup> I hope Members of Congress will utilize a trauma-informed lens and consider the full range of needs that children and families have—from needing nutritious food to having healthy, safe, and high-quality child care programs to attend—that matches our values and supports the human rights of children and the ideals of our democracy.

Thank you for your consideration. Once again, I am honored to be here, and I look forward to our discussion.

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The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, for your testimony.

I apologize. In error, I skipped Ms. Wilson. Thank you, Dr. Whitford for your testimony previously.

And now, we will hear from our final witness, Ms. Wilson. When you are ready, if you would unmute and please begin your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF RACHEL WILSON, ORLANDO, FL; ON BEHALF OF SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK OF CENTRAL FLORIDA**

Ms. WILSON. Good afternoon, Chairwoman Hayes and the rest of the Committee.

I have done things a little differently than it seems like a lot of the other speakers have. I have decided to speak from my heart and I haven't written out a full testimony.

The first thing I want you to understand is that when we talk about kids, we are talking about my kids. We are talking about these ones. These kids that have the best hearts of anyone that I could possibly talk about. This is Grace on her 14th birthday applying for her first job because she knows what it means to struggle. She spends her days on my roof under a full moon trying to manifest things, good things, for my family and for herself, and understanding body positive image.

This is Tyler. I have set a standard for Tyler to understand that SNAP is not a way of life. Government assistance is not a way of life, and for him, entry level position with the Brevard County School District with teacher's benefits and teacher's pay, and he is doing amazing.

This is Jack. Jack is 5. He has three different behavior disorders, including Autism Spectrum Disorder. He does tae kwon do to understand self-discipline and control. He is—I am doing my very best with government assistance to get them the assistance that they need, and the therapy that he needs through the government programs.

My job as a mother is to set the standard for these kids as to what acceptable is, to understand that government assistance is not a way of life. They do not need to feel the burden of what poverty feels like, or a pandemic crisis.

I have a few notes, so if I get a little bit distracted, please bear with me.

Before COVID, I was self-sustaining. I had a great income. I could take care of my kids on my own. Like I said, I have grown up on government assistance. I do not want that for my kids.

Right now, since the salons have opened back up, I am now working at 50 percent capacity of what I was before COVID. Whether it is people are scared to come in due to lack of vaccines or because of the virus that is out there, or because they have decided that hair and makeup is just not an expense they are willing to put into their budget.

Sometimes as parents, we have to understand that we have to set aside all of our pride to make sure that our kids don't feel the push of poverty. Their job as a kid is to do well in school, to be healthy, functional adults, and not worry about what they have to eat in the evening or during the day.

I have looked into a lot of different jobs. When I hear people tell me that I need to get a second job: I have looked at McDonalds. I have looked at Sonic. I have worked as a manager of a fast-food restaurant. They pay exactly \$11 an hour to start out with. That is \$440 a week before taxes, and \$339 a week after taxes. The total on that is \$1,356 a month after taxes. In Florida, you have to prove that you make three times the amount of income to afford a household. As a legal requirement, I have to have three bedrooms. A three-bedroom house in Florida is \$1,000 a month. I can't even prove that on a management position at a fast-food restaurant.

SNAP has been a lifeline for me since the pandemic to be able to give my kids what they need, the food that they need, the lack of concern, other than their schoolwork and doing well. My daughter wants to be a pediatric oncologist. The last thing she needs to worry about is how much food she has on the dinner table. She needs to worry about her schoolwork and what school she chooses to go to because it has the best dual enrollment program for an associate's degree. It is not their job to feel this.

SNAP is supplemental. SNAP is a step up. SNAP is a way to help me get my feet back under me after a pandemic, and to build my clientele back up to provide the life that my children need from this point forward. But sometimes we need help. We just need help. Just because we need help does not mean that we need to live under the means of basic human decency. We are not looking for it for the rest of our lives. We are just looking for it for a short time to help us get back to where we are going, and provide a functional, healthy lifestyle for our kids.

I thank the Chairwoman. That will be all.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wilson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RACHEL WILSON, ORLANDO, FL; ON BEHALF OF SECOND  
HARVEST FOOD BANK OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Dear Chairwoman Hayes and Committee Members,

My name is Rachel Wilson. I am a 39 year old single mother of three. I grew up in poverty and on government assistance. I grew up barely having enough food. I grew up believing when the power was shut off it was by choice because my mother had convinced my brother and I that we were learning what it was like to live like pilgrims. Well into adulthood I had just assumed this was the way of life. The more aware of real life I became, the more I realized I didn't want that for myself. I never really believed I would do much more than "just make it", but I wanted to. I moved out of my mother's house at the age of 17 with my high school sweetheart and before I knew it, I was a mother at 19 years old and once again on government assistance. The WIC program was a lifeline. At 22 years old I found myself in the position to either stay in an abusive relationship, or be a single mother with no education, and try to support my child. I worked as a waitress, bartender, and even laid tile to provide for my baby. But even in 2004, I had to work two jobs that covered rent, gas, diapers and used WIC and the SNAP program to pay for basic food needs. I quickly became accustomed to the lifestyle I so desperately didn't want to have.

I met my ex-husband and was married with a second child recently born by the middle of 2007. I worked as many shifts as I could between the bar and a fast food restaurant to provide for my family. Most days I worked 10 to 12 hours a day. In order to pay my bills, I had to make too much money to qualify for the SNAP program. I struggled every day of that life. The man I married was an alcoholic that just wouldn't hold a job so providing for the kids rested on my shoulders. I understand that my struggles are a reflection of my choices. However, when you grow up in poverty and what most refer to as "the ghetto", these are normal ways of thinking. Having a drug addict or alcoholic spouse is the "norm". Having more than one family member in a gang, in prison, or murdered is the norm. Believing that this is as good as it will ever get for you, is the norm. And all of these things were em-

bedded in my mind. In 2010 I left my husband and moved in with my mother. I had decided enough was enough. I didn't want this life for my children. I didn't want them to struggle like I did. I wanted to teach them a new way of life. A new normal. For 2 years I raised two babies with the help of my mother and step-father. I had always talked about big dreams and going back to school. But it wasn't until then and their encouragement, for the first time, my idea of "making it" was bigger than making management at a fast food restaurant.

In 2011, I enrolled in cosmetology school. I extended my schooling an extra 4 months so I could leave early to get to work. I missed my children **every day** for 14 months so I could better myself. I went to school Tuesday through Saturday from 8:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. and went to work as a waitress at a country club from 3 p.m. until 12 a.m. I again enlisted in the help of SNAP to help provide food for my children in my mom's home.

In 2012, I graduated cosmetology school. I had never been more proud of myself. I had actually completed something and was going to be someone. My children and I had moved into our first duplex alone. I was so proud that I didn't just have a job, but I had a career. Yet, I still found myself in the position of having to work two jobs to make it work. I had to work two jobs to keep myself off government assistance. I had to leave my 10 year old son home at night with my 4 year old daughter to go to a job waiting tables after my shift at the salon. I made it work. I made it work at the expense of my son's innocence and childhood and being an absent parent when my children needed me.

In 2013, my grandfather passed away and left me a portion of a life insurance policy. As you can imagine, it was quite difficult to spend the money he had left due to the circumstances I had received it. I held that money for approximately 2 months trying to decide what to do with it. I decided I was going to make a list of what he would have wanted me to do. I invested in myself and decided to jump into self-employment as a hairdresser. It took me 2 years of the most mentally and physically exhausting work I had ever done; but I did it. I was going to become everything everyone said I'd never be. I was self-sustaining, and not on any form of assistance. I was living just on the other side of the county line to keep my kids out of "the ghetto", and they were out. They were in good schools and not growing up the way I had. I sheltered them from that lifestyle. I wanted to set the standard of what was an acceptable lifestyle and set new standards for myself.

In 2015, I had my third child. I had to work harder than I ever had before. I found myself alone in a pregnancy not wanting to ask anyone for help. I did it though. I had saved money through the pregnancy for time off and I never did need anyone's help. But it cost my kids 7 months of their childhood. After 3 weeks of having Jack in September of 2015, I went directly back to work to avoid requesting assistance with bills, food and housing. I felt that I had reached the peak of what was available to me in Kansas. I had started noticing the influx in the crime rates and my 15 year old son starting to show interest in being around the same type of people I grew up with. At that point I decided to pack up my kids, everything I could in a 6' x 12' trailer and move to Florida. I just wanted a better life for them and myself and there was nothing I wouldn't do for that.

As with any big move there are struggles. The struggles I had included the ability to not only sustain a living situation for myself, but for the kids as well. I obtained a job at a hair salon locally. Because it was an hourly pay, and I had now worked for a corporation, not only was I not making enough money, but I was also being worked hours of the day that my children were home and needed me. They needed my help with homework, cooking dinner, their 7 month old infant brother, but mostly they just needed me. Again, I enlisted in the help of the SNAP program. I only needed the assistance for 6 months before I decided to get back into self-employment to better care for my children.

Up until the COVID shut down, I did not need any assistance from the SNAP program. As a small business owner, when the salon was shut down, I was not eligible for unemployment. I was flat out of a job. My mother gave me a credit card to utilize to pay my bills but I still had to figure out how to make the monthly payment. When I found out that the State of Florida waived work requirements for SNAP, I immediately applied. SNAP was the only way myself and my children were provided food through the shutdown. When it was time for me to requalify after the salon opened back up, even though I was only working at 50% of my normal clientele, I no longer qualified for the same amount. I had hit the benefits cliff and I couldn't understand why. I could barely pay my rent. I realized I was being measured on a scale of my total incoming dollars instead of what I had to pay out to work and buy supplies. I couldn't seem to find my way through the website to find and submit a profit and loss worksheet. I had literally lost all hope and slowly I was losing everything just trying to keep a place of employment and feed my chil-

dren. I obtained a resource packet from Miss Angela who runs head start at my son's school for VPK. It was there I found an actual phone number to someone who could help me sign up for SNAP. As I hysterically cried to her on the phone that I don't know which way to turn or how to get help, she asked me to join her at the local library so she could assist me in being accepted into the SNAP program.

The aftermath of COVID is much worse than the COVID shutdown itself. People have either decided that getting their hair done just isn't a necessity, or they're still scared to get out in public. I still work on about 50% of my original clientele. I barely pay my bills and am standing on a prayer when it comes to my rent and the COVID restrictions keeping me from being evicted. I don't **choose** to be on SNAP. I never have. I request help from the program when there's nowhere else to turn. Throughout my life, SNAP has been the only reason myself or my children have had the ability to eat like normal human beings should. We are not lesser of people because we need help. We don't want to reside in a state of poverty. Sometimes life just happens and more often than not it's happening to people who are trying to break the cycle of poverty. We are trying to set a new standard for ourselves, and our children. There is no amount of pride not worth giving up if that means our children do better than we did. SNAP is such an important program to make sure no one goes hungry whether it's due to sudden loss of employment or being a product of environment and not knowing any other way. With the resources supplied by the government, I believe we can get better. We can do better. But we need help. As a whole, with help from programs like SNAP and parents who just want better for their children, we can push for a "better" next generation. But we can't make that change alone.

Thank you,

RACHEL WILSON.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Ms. Wilson, for sharing your very heartfelt statement with us today.

That is all of our witnesses. At this time, we will recognize Members for questioning. The Members on the Committee will be recognized in order of seniority, alternating between Majority and Minority Members. You will be recognized for 5 minutes each in order to allow us to get to as many questions as possible. Please keep your microphones muted until you are recognized in order to minimize background noise.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Ms. Davis, we are pleased to welcome you to the House Committee on Agriculture for this Subcommittee hearing. Thank you so much for sharing your story. Your story is my story. Your testimony clearly demonstrates that SNAP is a crucial support system which enables recipients to have peace of mind while working towards economic stability for themselves and their families.

You testified that you recently hit the benefits cliff, which is an arbitrary dollar amount, above which you are cut off from benefits, just as you are beginning to feel stable. Can you describe to this Committee how the end of your SNAP eligibility is affecting your household budget, even as your income from working has increased?

Ms. DAVIS. Sure, I can do that. I can honestly say getting help from SNAP helps us a lot, but when we start doing better, we feel like we are being punished. So, I can say for myself, I really felt like I was being punished for just getting a little bit ahead, and I was still struggling. So, even though I achieved something, it was like they took it away, they took away something that I still needed. I wasn't financially ready to be financially steady to pay for everything.

So yes, I felt like I was being punished.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you. Your testimony also demonstrates that SNAP was just one part of your family's larger budget and economic stability. In Montgomery County where you live, it is a very high cost of living. Have you had to make any other sacrifices to stay in Montgomery County, and how did the end of your benefits impact your housing considerations?

Ms. DAVIS. Yes, I love Montgomery County, but the prices are high. I have to live with my mom. I tried applying for programs, other programs, but I am not qualified for it because of my salary from MCPS.

So, it is a real struggle. I think of the education in Montgomery County for my son, and that is what keeps me going. So, that is why I stay in Montgomery County.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Wilson, you had similar testimony about a working mom who through no fault of your own, your hours were cut, and you are trying to do everything that you can. It is important to note that this is the face of our SNAP beneficiaries right now, our children. Not people who willingly choose not to work. As you said, kids should have the responsibility of just being children.

Can you please describe how this stress has affected you and your children as you struggled with reduced hours with less of an income and still trying to put food on the table?

Ms. WILSON. Absolutely. I have not allowed my kids to feel the stress of what is going on. I have taken it on all on myself. I apologize if I get a little bit emotional. I have spent countless hours locked in the bathroom crying, trying to figure out how to take care of my kids without them understanding what is going on; countless hours in my bedroom, not wanting them to feel these things.

I remember when I first called SNAP and I first got in contact with a gal who helped with Second Harvest, and I called her completely ugly crying because I didn't know what I could do. My work hours being cut down, I haven't been able to make my rent payment. The only thing that is saving me right now is the COVID restrictions of eviction. I have been working on paying bills and my car payment, making sure that I can get to and from work and my kids can get to school, and making sure there is food provided on the table. The fact that SNAP has been able to provide those benefits for my kids to eat healthy meals, I have been able to pay a few more bills. I have been able to make small payments to my landlord.

But aside from that, my kids—I have not allowed them to feel that because I don't want them to feel that. It is not their job to feel that. They don't need to know what I am struggling through. They just need to live healthy lives as kids and worry about their studies and worry about mom being home with them, and cooking dinner and helping with homework. That is their job.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Ms. Wilson.

That is all I have for questioning. I thank both of you for sharing your stories here with the Committee today. I now recognize the gentleman from Nebraska for 5 minutes, the Ranking Member, Mr. Bacon, for his questions.

Mr. BACON. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I appreciate this. I appreciate, too, Ms. Davis and Ms. Wilson's stories and sharing

their journey. Again, it does show where SNAP provides a very valuable and important role in this time where people need this, and COVID surely caused more of these situations. So, we thank you for sharing.

I, too, am concerned about the cliff effect, and it does hold some people back from trying to get more employment. So, we need to relook at how we can modify policies to minimize the problems of cliff effects. So, I appreciate you sharing.

My first question is to Dr. Bauer, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, and Dr. Whitford. As you all know, in response to the pandemic Congress provided nearly \$70 billion in additional nutrition programming and funds. Were any of you surveyed about these needs or asked to provide testimony during this pandemic in the lead up of all this aid? Thank you.

I will go first to Dr. Bauer.

Dr. BAUER. In my role at a think tank, one of my jobs is to provide education and evidence to policymakers, so yes, I did speak publicly on potential Federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic on nutrition assistance programs.

Mr. BACON. Did you say you talked to people on the Agriculture Committee here?

Dr. BAUER. I did, yes.

Mr. BACON. Okay, thank you.

How about you, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett?

Dr. BOYNTON-JARRETT. I did not speak to Members of the Agriculture Committee during these changes.

Mr. BACON. Thank you.

Dr. Whitford?

Dr. WHITFORD. No, I did not and was not asked.

Mr. BACON. One of the concerns we had is we didn't have Committee hearings as we were determining \$70 billion in new spending.

A question for you three again. Just recently it was reported that 43 percent of businesses say they want to hire but they can't find employees right now. Forty-three percent, it is a pretty huge number. But yet last month, unemployment went up a little bit. I know businesses are closing early because they have a lack of employees.

So, my question is do you think government has any role in this, or have we inadvertently had a negative impact here? Dr. Bauer, I know you were suggesting otherwise in your testimony, but I am curious of your thoughts.

Dr. BAUER. Yes, I both suggest otherwise and the evidence suggests otherwise.

SNAP is a program that stimulates the economy, helping to turn the tide from contraction to expansion so every dollar that the Federal Government and SNAP generates more than a dollar, more like \$1.50 or \$1.70 in local economic activity. One of the reasons that SNAP is so effective is because of the way that it is targeted to families that need the benefit and want to spend those benefits quickly. And so, SNAP is an integral part of getting the economy back on track.

Mr. BACON. Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, what are your thoughts? We have 43 percent of businesses wanting to hire, yet unemployment went up. Has government inadvertently caused that? Thank you.

Dr. BOYNTON-JARRETT. Thank you so much for the question. I want to echo the comments of Dr. Bauer that SNAP really boosts local economy. It supports local farmers, small businesses, all size food retailers.

So, there was a study done by the USDA that showed a \$1 billion investment in SNAP would lead to nearly 500 new agricultural jobs, and over \$32 million in revenue for the agricultural industry. So, if you have ever seen a child who has used their—like what we call them locally as Bounty Bucks to get—try a mango, try fresh fruits and vegetables, to get collard greens at the local farmers' markets. Schools do it, families do it, and it is so encouraging for children.

But I have another piece to the response. So, as of December 2020, 13 percent of child centers and family care homes remained closed. We know high quality childcare is essential for women, mothers, and primary caregivers to return to the workforce. This is our key structural responsibility that must be met with policies that provide safety for early care and education providers, as well as prioritize high quality and accessible childcare so that children can be healthy and develop well.

Mr. BACON. Thank you, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett.

I have to give Dr. Whitford a chance. I have 30 seconds left.

Dr. Whitford?

Dr. WHITFORD. I just want to say four words to remember, "No way" and "Hell no." Now, these were the words spoken by two individuals just recently at our mission when they were approached, and I said, "Hey, how are things going?" The one guy said, "Well yeah, everything is going great." I said, "Are you employed?" He said, "No way," and then began to tell me how he thought that employment would actually hurt the benefits that he is receiving. I shared that in a staff meeting. One of my directors said that is interesting. I had another conversation with another person, and they said almost something very similar. They said hell no. Now, one of those guys actually pulled out his food stamp card when I was meeting with him and he said, "They put \$300 on this card last month. I don't even know what I'm going to do with it." Then he said I think I will go down and buy some—

The CHAIRWOMAN. All right, Dr. Whitford. I am sorry to cut you off, but the gentleman's time has expired.

Dr. WHITFORD. Okay. That is not any way to stimulate the economy.

Mr. BACON. Thank you, Dr. Whitford.

I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much.

Before I recognize the next witness, I just want to add that while the economy is starting to recover as businesses reopen, there are still eight million fewer jobs than there were before the pandemic, and jobs are down more than twice as much in low-paying industries compared to those that pay more. The majority of jobs lost because of the pandemic were in industries paying low to average wages, and not providing health coverage. The very jobs that many of our public benefit recipients work.



Also, there is the issue of childcare. So, there is so much to consider when we talk about unemployment and the economy and returning to work.

I now recognize the gentlelady from North Carolina, Ms. Adams, for 5 minutes for your questioning. Ms. Adams, can you please unmute and begin your testimony?

Ms. ADAMS. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Can you hear me?

The CHAIRWOMAN. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. ADAMS. Great. Thank you so much to you and the Ranking Member for hosting the hearing today. Thank you to our witnesses as well for their testimony. I am delighted that we are having this discussion.

Right now, 16.6 percent of households and 22 percent of households with children in the U.S. are facing food insecurity. In my state alone, 1.5 million people currently depend on SNAP to put food on their tables. And in the county that I represent, there are more than 150,000 people receiving SNAP benefits, which is an increase of more than 50,000 since March of last year. So, it is clear that there is a hunger crisis in our nation and while SNAP is a critical lifeline to families, the current benefit level is not simply inadequate. The average benefit is only \$1.40 per person per meal, and so that is why soon I am going to be reintroducing the Closing the Meal Gap, which permanently increases benefits by 30 percent, and eliminates the time limit on benefits because working hard is just not enough if you don't make enough. I know that firsthand. When I was a student raising two children on my own, I depended on SNAP to put food on my table, and I might not be here today if I didn't get that help when I needed it.

So, as you know, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the difficulties faced by those with the least, including people receiving SNAP.

So, my question is, do you think that flexibilities such as telephonic signatures, face-to-face interview waivers, and automatic extensions of the certification periods were significant contributors to the success of local governments managing a large influx in enrollees, and ensuring that the program continued to run smoothly during the pandemic and do you believe that it would be beneficial for some or all flexibilities, if they were made permanent?

Ms. Wilson?

Ms. WILSON. I apologize. I had to unmute my camera.

Ms. ADAMS. I understand.

Ms. WILSON. I don't believe that assistance should be made permanent; however, I do believe that they should be based off of a sliding scale fee. I need to go back to the previous speaker before you who had stated that somebody said hell no, he is not going to get a job because of the benefits.

Well, I will tell you as a mother, the one thing that I am fully aware of at all times is how much money I make, because if I make \$1 more than what SNAP assistance says that I can make, which is \$2,300 a month gross, to raise two children, I will lose \$500 a month assistance in SNAP benefits. So, \$2,300 a month minus taxes will not even pay my rent and my electric bill, and that is a very terrifying thing.

Ms. ADAMS. Yes. Go ahead.

Ms. WILSON. No, please, if you had another question, please go ahead because I was——

Ms. ADAMS. Well, I just want to comment that what you said in your testimony really did hit me hard, that throughout your life SNAP has been the only reason that you and your children have had the ability to eat like normal human beings should eat. And of course, that is a message our Committee, and more broadly, Congress needs to hear.

In my district here in Mecklenburg County, families utilize SNAP each month to keep food on their tables, and I know how critical that these programs are, and they are a lifeline to families who are struggling. So, can you talk a little bit about the importance of the program to your own family, and to ensuring that you can put food on your table, and how has it helped you get by during these difficult times?

Ms. WILSON. Absolutely. Growing up in poverty, SNAP has been a huge lifeline for me, especially growing up as a child. There are several times in my life that I have done productive actions in my life, trying to make sure that my children grew up in a different lifestyle. There are a lot of times that I have needed SNAP benefits to help me get to where I am going in life.

Before the pandemic, I did not need SNAP assistance because SNAP had assisted me throughout my lifetime to get to a position in my life where I can provide for my children.

Ms. ADAMS. Okay, thank you.

Dr. Whitford, in your testimony you imply that SNAP and Federal assistance programs of charity have no place in government. I respectfully wholly disagree. SNAP and our Federal safety net programs are a hand-up, not a hand-out, and many of us on this Committee once utilized the program.

So, do you believe that private charities and nonprofits could immediately and effectively provide for the 42 million Americans who are currently supported by SNAP?

Dr. WHITFORD. That is a great question.

[The information referred to is located on p. 69.]

The CHAIRWOMAN. Unfortunately, the time has expired for the answer, but you can submit the question in writing so that you can share your response for the gentlelady from North Carolina.

Ms. ADAMS. Great. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you. Thank you so much for your testimony.

At this time, I call on the gentleman from Arkansas, Representative Crawford. If you are——

Mr. CRAWFORD. Yes, ma'am.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Oh, there you are. If you can unmute and ask your questions.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Thank you.

I think we can all agree that SNAP is a useful tool for those in need. I would say, though, that if it were the be all, end all of nutrition requirements, we probably wouldn't be having this hearing today. I think that we wouldn't need food banks if SNAP was performing at peak level and answering all the nutrition needs of the

food-insecure. And so, there are some issues that I think are fair game and should be talked about.

And we also know that the administration of SNAP benefits oftentimes are not effective, and I will use that as a kind way of saying that sometimes they are mismanaged.

But my point is this. I haven't heard a heck of a lot of talk about the benefits of food banks and we are talking about the need for nutrition in the context of healthy foods, fruits and vegetables, fresh foods and things like that. In many cases in food deserts, our constituents rely exclusively on convenience stores where they are, by definition, consuming almost exclusively processed foods. So, their nutrition is compromised as a result, and it is because in those remote areas like in the first district of Arkansas that I represent, sometimes you just can't get a grocery store in some of these smaller towns. It is just cost prohibitive.

I am just wondering if anybody wants to weigh in on how we reach these remote areas, rural communities that don't have the resources? How do we reach them with nutritious foods like fresh fruits and vegetables and other proteins, in a meaningful way that makes them less reliant on processed foods? That seems to me to be a problem.

And then another question that has come up is this benefits cliff that we talk about. I am still looking for someone to help us figure out why we don't taper those benefits to match your income? If you are in the situation where you rely on benefits and you walk right up to the edge of that cliff on your job, but you are afraid to go any further because you are about to lose all those benefits, and so, that constrains you from being able to advance in your career for fear that you are going to lose any help that you might receive. I would think that we would need to match benefits proportionately and inversely proportionate to your income, so that you can make your way off of that, taper those benefits down, and obviously it is the end goal being that you don't need that, and now you can allow others to come in and benefit from those programs and repeat the process as it is necessary. I don't think we have had meaningful conversations about how we taper those benefits off, how we encourage and incentivize more consumption of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other protein sources. What are we doing to educate consumers about how to prepare more nutritious meals so they can benefit—and these taxpayer resources that are expended to help meet those nutritional requirements can then be done in a more efficient and effective manner?

And so, in the last minute and a half that I have, anybody wants to weigh in on that, I am going to stop and I am all ears.

Dr. BAUER. So, just very quickly. In terms of rewarding work through the SNAP Program, as I said, on your way to the benefit cliff, actually work is quite rewarded and total household resources increase as you take on extra hours, as you get a raise, in fact, as you enter the workforce. It is better to be on SNAP and working than it is to not.

In terms of tapering off the benefit cliff, broad-based categorical eligibility is the primary mechanism that we do that now, and that is the strategy going forward.

In terms of improving nutrition, all of our best research, including federally and Congressionally mandated randomized controlled trials so that increasing benefit adequacy is how families purchase more dark leafy greens and fruits and vegetables. Families know what they want to buy. They need the resources to do it. And so, increasing benefit adequacy will improve nutrition and diet quality.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Well, I appreciate the input. I wish we had more time. I have 10 seconds left, enough time to say thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and I will yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Mr. Crawford, and I am encouraged by your testimony. It sounds like an area where we can find some bipartisan collaboration, because the program is already means tested. However, the benefits have been found to be too small. So, we want to encourage work and want to support people as they are stabilizing their families and getting back to work. I look forward to having some productive discussions on this Committee on that very topic.

With that, I will now recognize the gentleman from Illinois. Mr. Rush, if you would unmute your microphone and begin your testimony.

Mr. RUSH. I want to thank you, Madam Chairwoman. This is really an exceptional hearing, and at my church, Madam Chairwoman, we have two sayings. "You can't teach what you don't know" and "You can't lead where you won't go."

Your testimony this morning certainly was indicative of the type of leadership for this Subcommittee that you want to exhibit. I have always thought, if you want to be a shepherd, then you have to smell like sheep. And so, Madam Chairwoman, again, thank you.

Ms. Wilson, Ms. Davis, thank you for the courage of your testimony. Your stories, in many ways, reminded me of my own childhood, and the lengths that my mother went to on behalf of me and my family. My mother taught school. My mother was a beautician, a business owner, and she took college courses on the side. My family was always on the edge financially, and at times, we depended on government benefits, the AFDC, and others. My mother worked hard to provide for her family, as do both of you, and as do millions of other families and other mothers on SNAP.

Food security is also personal to me for other reasons. In the early 1970s, I helped create and administer the Free Breakfast for Children Program in Chicago as a member of the Black Panther Party. In 1972, throughout our nation, the Black Panther Party was feeding 25,000 children free breakfast every morning before they went to school. All that is to say that I understand firsthand the importance of food security programs.

It is clear to me that we have much work to do. The pandemic exacerbated already existing hunger issues. In Illinois, 22 percent of kids in Cook County and 17 percent of children in Will County faced food insecurity in 2020. That number is far too high, and Madam Chairwoman, it goes without saying that I stand ready to work with you to alleviate these issues.

Dr. Bauer, it is disheartening for me to see the high percentage of Black and Hispanic adults who responded that sometime often the case that in the past week: "the children in my household were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food." I

am working on programs to eliminate that program by covering hot or prepared food. Can you describe how this change will help reduce food insecurity?

Dr. BAUER. Sure. So, anything that is going to make food more affordable helps benefits stretch more, but I think that it is a combination of programs that is going to improve food security among children over the coming year.

The devastation of school closures meant the loss of prepared school meal programs and Congress, in its wisdom, passed the Pandemic EBT Program. And my research found that pandemic EBT reduced very-low-food security among children by 30 percent in the week that it went out. Its reauthorization, and now it is really rolling out the door, and that is going to do a tremendous amount.

It also makes sense that we always know that schools are closed in the summer, and converting pandemic EBT into summer EBT for this summer is well validated and research- and evidence-based, and the combination of prepared meals and additional EBT benefits targeted to kids—

Mr. RUSH. Dr. Bauer, I have another question I need to ask you, and my time is running out.

Ms. Wilson, Ms. Davis, in your testimony and in your experience, does SNAP provide enough flexibility to provide necessities for your families? Are there any changes in regards to the flexibility of SNAP that you recommend?

Ms. WILSON. The only thing that I would recommend within SNAP is that they work on a sliding scale fee so that I didn't have to worry about a dollar amount that I made that would take \$500 a month away from my children. I budget my \$500 a month into 4 weeks, and I know how much of it I can spend every week to make sure that the SNAP benefits provide for the entire month. But if I make \$1 more than the allotted amount of money, they take \$500 away from me. If it worked on a sliding scale fee, then they took away 50¢ for every extra dollar that I made, I would be able to more work myself off of SNAP benefits.

Mr. RUSH. I yield back, Madam Chairwoman.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Representative Rush.

At this time, I would like to recognize the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. DesJarlais. If you would unmute your microphone and please begin your questions for the witnesses.

Mr. DESJARLAIS. Yes, ma'am. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

First, I want to thank all of our witnesses today for taking time to share their stories with us. Your experience and knowledge play an important role in helping this Committee do its job, and I appreciate the chance to hear from all of you, even if it is virtually.

I will say, it is a good day when we are finally having a discussion about moving past the pandemic, and we are all ready to get back to a sense of normalcy.

As we have these conversations today, the most frequent complaint I am hearing from businesses and employers in my district is the lack of applications and subsequent inability to hire. This frustration spans across all industry, from steel work [inaudible] and we have touched on that a bit today. We have heard today in several testimonies that people don't want to work for fear of losing benefits, because for many, this is all they have ever known. But

also, I agree with the sliding scale approach as opposed to the cliff, because that does seem punitive.

Dr. Whitford, you have firsthand experience at helping get people back in to work. Could you share some of those thoughts as we come out of COVID-19, and businesses are desperately in need of workers, and what can this Committee do to encourage people to seek out employment and take steps towards self-sufficiency?

Dr. WHITFORD. Well, it really—for us, it is inspiration and relationships. So, people come in our doors and we are immediately recognizing every individual as a person made in the image of God, and so, there is a natural tendency for all of us to create and be productive. And so, what we found is that it is best to just take a person up on that right as they are coming in the doors and begin to have them helping with whatever they can, and that is where our Worth Shop comes in. And what we found is that out of our—just out of our emergency shelter alone, typically we are able to see an employment rate out of our shelter of about 60 percent, which is great when you consider that people coming in don't have a job at all. And we really do believe that that has to do with how we are engaging the person as soon as we see them, and allowing them to begin to earn things that they need.

A lot of people have not realized that they have the ability that they have, and it requires relationship, encouragement, and inspiration, all the things that the private-sector is so good at doing when it comes to charity work. And that is really the key to helping people get back into work, but it has been a problem of late. It has been very difficult, and again, it is one testimony after another that I have of people who have felt like they are held back. They are fearful, really. They are fearful. It is a true thing. I mean, the welfare cliff is a fearful thing, and when you become dependent upon it, it is really hard to break free from it. And that is what we found.

So, I think that one thing that we could do, if you wanted to help mission leaders like me who are trying to help people get back to work, we really do need to regard this idea of subsidiarity. It is this—from back in an encyclical written by Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*, and he says: “Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.” In other words, there are concentric circles of help that should exist, and when the Federal Government is doing that work for my neighbor in need, it disrupts things that are not going to allow us to build the relationships that we need to, and inspire and encourage people to get a job.

Mr. DESJARLAIS. I appreciate your testimony.

Madam Chairwoman, it looks like—okay, I see the clock is moving. It looked like it got stuck. I got a little bit of time left.

Dr. Whitford, you had mentioned in your testimony instances of individuals selling their SNAP benefits for 50¢ on the dollar as well as able-bodied individuals willing to work, but only under the table so as not to interfere with their SNAP eligibility.

It goes without saying, that is not how these benefits are intended to function. Could you talk a little bit about that, and specifically any changes that would help the program function as intended as a temporary handout to those who need it most with the end goal being self sufficiency and not a lifetime of government dependency? I think you have about 45 seconds.

Dr. WHITFORD. Well, we have to get as close to the problem as possible. Again, going back to this idea of a neighbor knowing his neighbor best, we really do have to allow for—my recommendation would be let's start with letting the states actually administer these programs, and we would be able to work—I would be able to work with my legislators in my state to see if we could do some things that would actually improve how the program is working and how we could actually help people get where they want to be.

So, that is, again, we are just seeing a continuous problem of people that are getting hung up. Much of it is a fear factor and dependency.

Mr. DESJARLAIS. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much. As I am listening to the testimony, I am reminded that the scripture also says: "When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me." So, that is also a part of our responsibility.

With that, thank you so much for your testimony. I think the next—is Mr. Sablan on? No, he is not.

So, we will move on to the next Member on this side. I now recognize the gentleman from California. Mr. Carbajal, if you will unmute your microphone and begin your questioning.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Let me just start by saying how I personally know how critical food assistance can be for families. When I was young, these programs actually helped reduce the financial barriers for my parents who were struggling to get by, making minimum wage working as farmworkers, my father was. They worked so hard to give my siblings and I a better way of life. It wasn't for the lack of not working. He was working 6, sometimes 7 days a week, but it was difficult making ends meet.

I was fortunate to have had an opportunity to graduate from a great university—first attend university, then graduate, serve our country in the Marine Corps, serve my community in local government, and now in Congress.

Ensuring that all children have consistent access to fresh and nutritious food year-round is critical for our kids to be able to grow up healthy and prepare for any career they might choose, including maybe even serving in Congress.

Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, how can the SNAP Program be enhanced and modernized to incentivize families with children to purchase and incorporate fresh and nutritious food consistently in their diet?

Dr. BOYNTON-JARRETT. Thank you so much for your remarks and for sharing your story, and the invitation to this question.

The work that I do with Vital Village Network really arises from the question you shared. I am trained as a pediatrician. I should be in a clinic right now, but you know what? We spent \$8.3 trillion

on healthcare last year. The vast majority is spent on treating chronic illnesses. There actually is strong evidence to show that SNAP is a benefit that actually helps prevent the development of metabolic syndromes in adulthood which are associated with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and overweight. So, there are tremendous benefits to the early childhood investment. Investing in nutritious food, reducing stress and distress experienced by parents, and really calling hunger what it is.

I don't know of a single person who experienced chronic food insecurity or hunger that doesn't remember what that felt like. We actually can consider chronic food insecurity and hunger an extremely adverse experience and potentially traumatic experience.

So, it is really my belief that we need to work much more collaboratively to build a more resilient food system, and SNAP is a big piece of that. But also, really engaging parents and members of the community in helping to modify the policies so that it doesn't do the things that Ms. Wilson and Ms. Davis have shared around creating higher degrees of stress, higher degrees of anxiety by removing benefits as folks become socially mobile and advance.

Thank you.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett. I am just trying to get a couple other questions in there, so thank you very much.

Ms. Wilson, I really appreciate your courage to share your personal story with us. Nobody wants to be dependent on public assistance and I appreciate your sharing your story with us. I also appreciate my colleague, Mr. Crawford's, comments about how we can work to develop a better system where we don't penalize people, because it would be foolish for somebody who is going to be a few dollars away from being cut off to want to give up that benefit when you really rely on that. I know that.

So, the question should be how do we help people transition or enhance their quality of life without penalizing them? And, we need to do better in that respect. So, I appreciate Representative Crawford's comments, and I sure hope that I can work—we can work together to address this issue as the Chairwoman also said earlier.

One of the main ways we can make sure that SNAP fulfills its mission to fight hunger is to ensure that the benefit is adequate. Often, SNAP recipients still rely on food banks and other supports to make ends meet for their families. Like much of our country, rural areas in my district on the Central Coast face specific challenges, such as cost to travel to get food or other hardships.

Dr. Bauer, how can we make sure that SNAP allotments reflect the time and financial costs families face to purchase their groceries, and what other changes would you recommend to make sure families have a benefit adequate to meet their needs for food?

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you. I am sorry, Dr. Bauer, before you begin to answer, the time has expired, so we will send that question and you can submit a written answer for the record, if you don't mind.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. You are right, I am out of time. I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you. Thank you so much.



I now recognize the gentlelady from Missouri, Mrs. Hartzler. If you would unmute your microphone and begin your questioning.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Thank you, Chairwoman Hayes, and thank you for each of our witnesses here. I appreciate the insights and the heart that you all have to try to make everyone have a good life and have food.

Dr. Whitford, I appreciate your heart and your story of you and your wife and the ministry that you started and dedicated yourself to right here in Missouri. I know that a lot of ministries and a lot of organizations are moving past just providing food, and including moving on to the workforce development and other things in order to help people succeed in life. Could you expand a little bit on how you are helping individuals in your ministry connect to work and to a better life?

Dr. WHITFORD. Yes, absolutely. Thank you.

So, we have a program called Forge, it is a center for virtue and work, and this is a long-term program that is focused on character development and work readiness. It really is a workforce development program.

So, we have different tracks. Maybe somebody who doesn't have their GED begins to work on that. If not, they go toward a national career readiness certification track, if they already have their GED. They go through a lot of classes like stewardship and economics, government and legal living, healthy living, seven steps to Christian maturity, and the like, and then they move more into their work ready phase, and that includes things like doing functional capacity evaluations to determine what a person is able to do. We go through personality assessments. We do computer literacy training, mock interviews, résumé writing, and a lot of other things that go along with that, getting ready to go into the workforce. And then those individuals will bridge into our community of partnerships really with local employers, and know that they go through a season of coaching. It is an internship of sorts for 8 weeks, and many of them end up right there because as you know, base employment is a great need these days, and a lot of employers are just looking for folks who will show up to work on time and be ready to go and be consistent and reliable. And that is certainly one of the things that we are doing in our 12 to 15 month long-term program.

Mrs. HARTZLER. That is wonderful. So, it sounds like a workforce development program that you have established yourself. Are you working with any government programs or are these all just generated within your own organization?

Dr. WHITFORD. Well, certainly there are some clients that we are engaging who are receiving some help from other government organizations, but we really have decided we want to try to do as much as we can from a voluntary basis from the private-sector, engaging our local community to be involved on a volunteer level. And so, we have developed a lot of things that there might be analogous government counterparts, but I just believe that the private-sector can do an incredible amount if given the opportunity.

Mrs. HARTZLER. There was a wonderful powerful scripture shared a minute ago that I know all of us take to heart, but can you just clarify when Jesus was talking about how we should feed the hungry and clothe them and your brother in need. Was he say-

ing that the government should do that, or who was he saying should do that?

Dr. WHITFORD. Well, no, he was talking to individuals and that is the key point to be made. In fact, the name of our ministry, Watered Gardens, comes out of *Isaiah* 58 where God is speaking to his people to be really charitable, to feed and to clothe and to shelter. But in *Isaiah* 58:10, God says "If you will extend your soul to the hungry." So, He wants us to do more than feed. He really wants us to develop relationships with people. "If you will extend your soul to the hungry, . . . You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail." It is a beautiful passage.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Absolutely.

Have you talked to any other entities across this country about your program to replicate it? I know that you are serving a four-state region, but we need to have programs like yours all over.

Dr. WHITFORD. Yes, right now we are talking with leaders in different communities around the nation to consider even our Worth Shop model. Could that be something that as a collaborative that could occur in a community where organizations, churches, missions could refer people as a way to restore dignity and give an opportunity for people to earn what they need.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Great. I appreciate your work and your heart, and thank you very much.

I will yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Mrs. Hartzler, and thank you for that lesson in virtue, because again, I agree that Jesus was talking to the people and we are a government of the people, for the people, by the people who represent the people. So, we are those people.

With that, I will now recognize the gentlelady from New Hampshire. Ms. Kuster, if you will unmute your microphone and begin your questions.

Ms. KUSTER. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I am so grateful, and while I appreciate the discussion on virtue, I do want to reorient the Committee back to the task at hand, which is the incredible opportunity, but also the obligation, to care for those in need in our community. And in my case, that includes this important government program to feed children, because of a heartbreaking pandemic.

Food insecurity is plaguing my state, and while I appreciate the role of the churches, I think that we as the government certainly have an important role in this as well to ensure equity and to make sure that everyone is kindly welcome as we do in New Hampshire.

I want to take this opportunity to elevate SNAP, because this program has never been more essential than it has been in the past year. COVID-19 has exacerbated food insecurity. In my district and across our state, approximately one in seven people, including one in five children, have been struggling with hunger during the pandemic. And thankfully, Federal nutrition programs like SNAP have been providing critical support to families, both during, prior to, and after COVID-19.

Let's remember that SNAP is not a luxurious program. In 2019, the average SNAP benefit for recipients in my state was approximately \$1.22 per meal, and I would certainly challenge anyone on this Committee to make a meal, a nutritious meal, for \$1.22. But even that modest amount can make a difference when a family has to pinch pennies to put food on the table every night, and I appreciate our witnesses, and indeed, our Members on the Committee talking about their own personal experience with supplemental nutrition.

As the pandemic rocked our economy, many had to rely on SNAP for the very first time, and I participated in food drives and in the distribution of food during COVID, and met many families who were in line to pick up food for the very first time. To keep up with this need, I have been proud to champion increases in food assistance programming in the COVID response packages passed by Congress. We must also continue to destigmatize participation in SNAP. Each SNAP participant has a story, from serious health ailments to the lack of affordable, accessible childcare, to the lack of jobs in an economically hard-hit region, and all of these challenges, and many more, represent broader problems that deserve the attention of Congress.

But in the meantime, Americans still need to eat. Efforts to cut or weaken SNAP, in my view, are simply cruel. No one should have to go hungry in America. SNAP is a critical lifeline to those who need modest support feeding themselves and their families.

On that note, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, thank you for sharing your knowledge and expertise with us today. I appreciated your description of the multiple challenges that face low-income mothers and children during the pandemic, and I am particularly interested in your views of a trauma-informed approach. I am the founder and co-chair of the bipartisan taskforce to end sexual violence, and I spent years advocating for first responders, courts, and other stakeholders to have a trauma-informed approach to avoid re-traumatizing survivors.

Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, can you elaborate about how your trauma-informed approach works in relation to food insecurity and Federal nutrition programs, and what your recommendations are?

Dr. BOYNTON-JARRETT. Thank you for the question, and I am honored to answer this question. It is critically important, and it really begins with science. We understand that chronic and cumulative adversities, particularly in early childhood, have a critical impact on the developing bodies and brains of children.

If we think about chronic food insecurity, which often is associated with housing insecurity, inadequate or insufficient or low-quality childcare, poverty, and a number of adversities, we are actually—we also actually have evidence that investing in mitigating and preventing those early childhood adversities have numerous impacts on health, developmental, and life course, so who people will become as adults. Will they go on to higher education? What skills and capacities will they bring to parents, and how will they engage in our economy in productive ways in the future?

Frederick Douglass said it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men, and that is what we are talking about. Why would we ever allow a child to go hungry or to be denied a benefit?

So, a trauma-informed approach really, one, understands that neuroscience, and then says well, wow, our food system is not resilient. It is insufficient——

The CHAIRWOMAN. All right, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, I have to cut you off.

Ms. KUSTER. Thank you, and I yield back. Thank you so much.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you. I am sorry about that.

I now recognize the gentleman from Indiana, Mr. Baird, if he is on.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. My camera should be up, and so——

The CHAIRWOMAN. Your camera is not on, sir. You have to turn on your camera first.

Mr. BAIRD. Okay.

The CHAIRWOMAN. There you go. Thank you. I now recognize you to ask your questions.

Mr. BAIRD. So, my question really goes to——

The CHAIRWOMAN. Just a minute. Do we still have the timer? Your camera just went off again. There you go. Okay. I now recognize Mr. Baird.

Mr. BAIRD. Okay. So, what I really want to know, Dr. Whitford, is a lot of programs start off with being food distribution, and then later they move into other areas. How have you been able to look for making access to other supportive organizations with regard to helping [inaudible]?

Dr. WHITFORD. Representative Baird, I am so sorry. You will have to re-ask the question. You were cutting in and out. I just couldn't get it.

Mr. BAIRD. Okay. A lot of organizations start off distributing food. Can you hear me now okay?

Dr. WHITFORD. Yes, I can.

Mr. BAIRD. Okay. They start off distributing food, and then they move and evolve into additional identification and assistance with helping those individuals on the SNAP Program with other areas that are beneficial and helpful. So, would you care to elaborate on how you have looked for ways to help individuals, not only because of the SNAP and the food issue which is extremely important, but then how to look for other sources of benefit and help? Did that come through okay?

Dr. WHITFORD. Yes, I think so, and I hope I understand your question correctly.

One of the things that we have really worked hard on is a collaborative model in our community. So, many years ago, I launched an online networking tool in our city that we actually help other communities get connected with now too where organizations are sharing information, not only just on individuals that they are helping so that we can better understand how to steward our resources more effectively and target our charity more accurately, but it also allows us to know what is being offered in the community and what would be the next best source of help for an individual.

So, again, there is no one—I think we should get away from, like, a one-stop shop idea. In this day and age, we don't need to be thinking in centralization of services. I really believe that we can connect together, using technology that is available, and be able to

operate more cohesively as a unit in a community. Because although Watered Gardens, my ministry, does a lot of different stuff, we don't cover every base. And so, there is a need to collaborate with other organizations.

I hope that answers that question.

Mr. BAIRD. Yes, it does.

I guess I would like to move to Ms. Davis and Ms. Wilson. I really appreciated them sharing their stories. So, as a Member of this Committee, I would like to have their perspective on how we might improve the program.

Ms. Davis, if you want to start?

Ms. DAVIS. I would say to improve the program is the person you are assigned to works more with their person. So, I was assigned somebody, but I didn't really talk to them. It was more transferring papers. I didn't know my food stamps were cut off. I didn't get the letter until a month later, and I needed my card. So, for them to ease the process of you slowly not getting your food stamps, that communication, that is what I would say needs to improve.

Mr. BAIRD. Fine-tuning the efficacy and the efficiency of the delivery system, is that—

Ms. DAVIS. Right. So, we can adjust to get our minds prepared to not have it anymore, because luckily I had support to help me pay for stuff, but because I didn't know, I was struggling and I was crying, and I had to decide, like, am I going to keep going for my dream, or am I going to stop and try to stay on it until I am still comfortable enough to go out there again? And luckily, I had support to go ahead and continue on what I was doing. So—but a lot of people are not fortunate about that—with that.

Mr. BAIRD. Well, thank you for that information.

Madam Chairwoman, do I have time—

Ms. WILSON. If I may step in for a second? If I may step in for 1 second, I think what Ms. Davis is trying to say is that a taper off effect would be way more essential to the government process than just a cut off.

If I may note, there are two chairmen on here who have now noted that government assistance has put them where they are today. Government assistance gave their families the ability to support them and push them to be more productive members of society, which puts them in the position that they are today.

But, what Ms. Davis was trying to say is a taper off effect would be way more effective than just making a specific dollar amount and being cut off from a several hundred-dollar amount of providing food for her family.

Mr. BAIRD. A scalable situation is what you are really suggesting, isn't it?

Ms. WILSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. BAIRD. To scale a dollar amount, yes.

Well, thank you. I appreciate all of the witnesses being here, I appreciate the opportunity to serve on this Committee, and I yield back, Madam Chairwoman.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, Representative Baird for your thoughtful questions.

I now recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. Panetta. If you would unmute and ask your questions.

Mr. PANETTA. Understood. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I appreciate this opportunity. Let me thank all of the witnesses for your time, for your preparation, for your willingness to share not just your expertise, but your life experiences with us today. So, thank you very much.

Once again, I am Jimmy Panetta. I represent the Central Coast of California, just above my colleague, Salud Carbajal's, district. In my district, we have a lot of bounty. Agriculture is the number one industry. We have a lot of specialty crops, a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables, and unfortunately, technology hasn't caught up with the way of how you harvest that, so we need a lot of people to do that.

However, we don't just have bounty here, we have a lot of beauty, too. So, that makes it a little bit expensive—actually, a lot expensive—to live here on the Central Coast. And that is why a lot of the people that put food on our table that are surrounded by fresh fruits and vegetables every day—it doesn't necessarily mean that those people have access to those same fresh fruits and vegetables.

Now, long before the pandemic, the very farmworkers that put that food on our table provided us with that food security throughout the pandemic, struggled disproportionately with hunger in 2019. What I mean by that, nearly nine percent of my constituents relied on SNAP. However, over the past year as we have seen throughout the country, in my district, especially in the Salinas Valley, one in four children were food-insecure. And by the end of last year, household food insecurity spiked to about 35 percent in certain parts of my district.

Now, I saw it firsthand when I would go out and volunteer at the food banks and hand out the food, and seeing the growing lines pretty much in all parts of the Central Coast. But what I have realized and what I believe is that we couldn't food bank our way out of the pandemic—and we cannot food bank our way out of hunger.

And so, I am grateful that we have finally increased SNAP benefits by 15 percent through the end of September, but we are obviously going to have to work to do more to prevent a Federal food cliff come that day.

Now, I believe we need to look to the future and to see how we can improve SNAP, not just as a response to the pandemic, but as a response to the new normal. And in doing that, I do believe that flexibility is crucial, is critical.

So, let's take that look when we start developing the next farm bill, let's work together so that we can ensure that this lifeline program as we are hearing today, this lifeline program better serves all of those who need it.

Now, I know many of the witnesses have been on for an hour and a half, so I am just going to narrow it down. Dr. Bauer, I am going to pick on you. The other witnesses can kind of zone out for the remaining minutes that I have, to let you know.

Dr. Bauer, the U.S. Government Accountability Office issued a report that analyzed that more than two dozen studies among food insecurity among college students, and took a look at that. And it found that America's college campuses have alarmingly high rates of hunger with 39 percent of all low-income students experiencing

food insecurity. Many low-income students are also the parents of small children, and these individuals work incredible hours to study, raise their families, and pay their bills, as we heard from one of our witnesses today. That is why earlier this year, Representatives Gomez, Harder, and myself introduced H.R. 1919, Enhanced Access to SNAP, or EATS Act, to make permanent changes to the rules that have long denied SNAP to low-income Americans solely due to their status as college students.

Dr. Bauer, can you elaborate on the ramifications of the existing student rule, and how would amending the current law to remove the burdensome work requirements improve student access, particularly for first generation low-income students?

Dr. BAUER. Certainly, that is right. College students are required to work in order to receive benefits, but what we really have right now is a college completion crisis. We want to do everything we can to ensure that once students enroll they are able to complete, and part of that is having enough food on the table.

And so, I certainly think that there is reform necessary, including looking at the backgrounds of what students have. We are not doing that currently when we are assessing whether students are eligible for SNAP, including through the work requirement, and so, there are a variety of ways that we can better support first gen low-income students to get those degrees, including for student parents.

Mr. PANETTA. Great. Now also, I have introduced H.R. 2339, Military and Hunger Prevention Act, which establishes basic needs allowance to help low-income military families purchase food. Can you elaborate on the impacts of counting the BAH as income when determining servicemembers' SNAP eligibility?

Dr. BAUER. Certainly. What we don't want to do is punish servicemembers for serving, and that is sort of how the formula works right now. A basic needs allowance would allow us to reward work, reward service by ensuring that low-income servicemembers are eligible for SNAP when they should be.

Mr. PANETTA. Great. Dr. Bauer, thank you.

My time is up. Madam Chairwoman, I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Mr. Panetta.

I now recognize—is she on—the gentlelady from Florida, Representative Cammack. If you will unmute your microphone and begin to ask your questions.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I appreciate everybody being on here today, and as my good friend and colleague, Mr. Panetta, mentioned, the witnesses have been on here for quite some time, and so, there may be a bit of some repeat questions here. But the thing that I find encouraging is that Republican, Democratic regardless, we all are looking to get to the same end point, and we all have a little bit of a different way of how we get there, but the fact that we all have the same end goal is very encouraging.

I'm going to start with some prepared remarks and then jump into a few questions, and again, apologies for some repeat questions.

Since its inception, the goal of food assistance has always been to provide temporary emergency relief to those most in need, and

the mix of an unprecedented pandemic in which millions across the country found themselves suddenly out of work, relief was expanded and waivers provided. New programs were rolled out to both provide food for those in need, but also provide America's producers with much-needed support in the midst of a collapsing supply chain.

Now, like my friend and colleague Representative Panetta, I represent a very rural district which is rich in agriculture production, and so, we face some of the similar challenges.

One of these programs, Farmers to Families Food Box Program, supplied these boxes of American grown produce to families in need, and in Florida specifically, farmers and food banks alike were very excited to participate in the Food Box Program with farmers able to supply boxes of food to those who needed it most, while much of their traditional customer base stayed the same. And I know firsthand because I was part of the some of the distribution work here, the food banks in my district now first spoke to me about lines around the block to receive these boxes of food with fresh, healthy, American grown produce. I heard from several of our Florida growers and producers about how the program was a lifeline during this unprecedented time.

To that end, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, do you mind touching on how now that the Food Box Program has ended, how we might be able to look at ways that we can continue to promote healthy food, support our producers, and meet the needs of our families and individuals that are struggling, and what that might look like, both under SNAP, but also how we can engage our community partners alike in this?

Dr. BOYNTON-JARRETT. Oh, thank you so much for the question, and you actually hit on what I think is the most critical answer. I really do think it needs to be collaboratively co-designed with community partners so that we are utilizing all of the assets and existing resources within communities most productively, and we are reaching the families that are deepest in need. And when we think about it, we rarely engage those who are most socially marginalized in these types of decision making, in these types of policy strategies, but in all of my work locally through Boston Medical Center Vital Village, those are the best ideas. Those are the most effective ideas.

Actually, throughout this pandemic, we have numerous examples of ideas that actually originated from community members and neighbors helping neighbors that could be scaled and built into more formal policies and infrastructures.

What is most exciting around these direct partnerships between producers and families is really the way the children can become engaged. If you see a child that grows a cucumber and tastes the cucumber they grew for the first time, it is like nothing else, right? What better way to stimulate nutrition and a sense of ownership and responsibility for children? And as we have talked about many times, really honor their dignity and shared humanity.

Thank you for the question.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Thank you, Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, and you gave me a perfect segue.



My next—probably last question since I am running short on time is for Dr. Whitford. Your testimony is laced with references to dignity, community, civility, relationships, compassion, and as someone myself who was, not even actually 10 years ago almost, was homeless, I understand firsthand the struggles that participants in this program go through.

But I would like to know, in an ideal world, when it comes to those that you are trying to help and get back on their feet, where do you see the sweet spot for government with community organizations?

Dr. WHITFORD. Again, I want to go back to the idea of subsidiarity and properly layering that. The research talks about crowd out, the crowd out effect that occurs when government is involved in helping local community people in need. And so, in fact, we have even seen that depending on what is going on [inaudible] government benefits, we will actually see a drop in our mission market where we have a little grocery store where people come through. They have healthy options to choose from. We will see a drop in that.

I really believe that as government steps back a little bit, you will see more of the private-sector that will step in, and I think that is really one of the best things that government could do. Just figure out how can we allow for the private-sector to do what the private-sector does so well, which is be charitable.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, Representative Cammack, for your really thoughtful questions.

I now would recognize the gentleman from the Northern Mariana Islands, Mr. Sablan, who has joined us. Thank you so much. If you would unmute yourself and ask your questions.

Mr. SABLÁN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and congratulations on holding your first hearing.

I apologize for my tardiness. I am juggling between four committees, and I just noted that I need to go start on Natural Resources, but Madam Chairwoman and to the witnesses, I don't have a question. I just have a short comment.

I have been working for 12 years now to bring SNAP to the Northern Mariana Islands, because we, the Northern Mariana Islands, my district is one of three in the United States that are on block grant and it is just so difficult whenever there is a disaster and we need additional funds, we have to go and legislate the funds, and all different kinds of difficulties. Sometimes Congress works amazingly and like a slow boat, it just comes a little faster or a little slower.

But yeah, hunger is—yesterday I went around and I visited the elderly at home. I went first to a place where they congregate, and then I followed this vehicle that distributes food to the homebound. I had some short conversations with those who are homebound, and some of them lost their qualification for food assistance because their income is \$2 higher than the formula—I mean, the threshold. I mean not some—one of them actually, \$2 higher than the threshold, and she lost something like \$96 worth of food aid. That is what she was getting a month. That is the enhanced one,

because usually you get \$25 a month for a single—for an individual.

But just—I am working and I will continue to work hard, and I ask the Chairwoman's assistance and cooperation, because this is really—I wouldn't be working this hard and asking for this if I didn't think it was necessary.

But I want to thank the witnesses for being here and sharing their thoughts with the Committee. Madam Chairwoman, thank you very much. With all due respect, I need to get back to Natural Resources for the votes that have just been called. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Mr. Sablan, and thank you for joining us even briefly.

The next Republican witness that—I am sorry, Member that I have is the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Cloud, but I don't see him. Are you on?

Okay, that is fine. We will go to Mr. Lawson, the gentleman from Florida. If you will unmute for your questioning and we will go back to Mr. Cloud as soon as he is on the platform. Mr. Lawson, if you want to unmute and begin your questions.

Mr. LAWSON. Okay. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and I want to thank you and Ranking Member Bacon for this hearing. It is a very important hearing.

To the witnesses, I want to welcome all of you to the hearing today.

I represent the Fifth Congressional district which stretches along in north Florida along the border of Alabama, so to speak, and Georgia, and down to Jacksonville. About 200 miles or so in this district, and two major cities in between, and most other areas are rural and farming community.

My district staff and I volunteer frequently to help with food banks and farm share, and I was doing this even when I was in the Florida Legislature, making sure that food banks and farm share stuff was funded when I chaired the Agriculture Committee in the House and in the Senate.

What I am really getting at—and this question is probably—will go to Ms. Davis and Ms. Wilson. Can you both speak to how TEFAP programs play a role in making sure that our families have nutritious food, nutrition in their food to eat when SNAP just wasn't enough to help them make the entire month of meals during this pandemic? I want to say this in conjunction to that, we have a lot of hurricanes, and one of the things I had to petition the government with is to allow SNAP recipients to get hot meals for their families when they have no place to cook and stuff of this nature. And that probably needs to be a part of any legislation that we pass, and I just want to see how you all respond to it.

Ms. DAVIS. I will go first.

It is good for them to have access to hot meals, because I—those people that can't—don't have a stove, they can't—they are not very skilled at cooking or know much about it. So, if they could get access to somebody else making it for them and still have that self-pride of still getting actual meals and not have to always go to junk food. So, I think that is a good idea.

Ms. WILSON. So, I will follow up and say regarding hot meals when it comes to natural disasters and hurricanes. When the hurricanes do come around, we don't have electricity. We don't have gas. The hot meals, because they are denied on EBT SNAP, we can't—I mean, they have some supermarkets that do provide cold meals that you can heat in a microwave; however, it is really a heartbreaking experience to explain to your kids yes, I have a box of chicken from Publix, but we can't eat it hot because there is nothing to heat it up with. The kids should not feel the pressure of that.

So, hot meals being denied on EBT SNAP is not the best idea, but I understand why the idea is there. However, I don't—what I don't understand is what the difference is between having a hot meal and a cold meal, and taking it home and warming it up.

Mr. LAWSON. Okay.

Ms. WILSON. The only difference is 15 minutes and hoping that you have a microwave that has power to it during a hurricane—to warm it up for your children.

Mr. LAWSON. Okay.

One of the things that is very prevalent, and I was [inaudible], why is it that there is so much bad publicity coming out of the people, in your opinion, on SNAP benefits simply due to the fact that people see them in grocery stores and so forth getting food, and they think its to a disadvantage that they are getting each meal. They can't get alcohol and cigarettes, all the things that people think they get.

How do you think the news gets out—and I know my time is about to run out—that people feel that way about this?

Ms. WILSON. I don't think there is enough knowledge about the SNAP Program. I will tell you now that there is absolutely no availability to alcohol and tobacco, which you already know. But I just believe that people have a really skewed approach to EBT SNAP and government assistance, and they think that it is a free ride for all.

I think getting the word out or making people more knowledgeable about the fact that EBT SNAP is truly about just minimum assistance and essential foods needs would probably be a better approach to the situation.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you.

Mr. LAWSON. I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, Mr. Lawson.

I still don't see the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Cloud, so I will move on to the next witness on the Majority side. I now recognize the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. McGovern. If you will unmute and ask your questions, please.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman. I appreciate it.

Let me just say that SNAP is perhaps the most important anti-hunger program that we have, and charity can't do it alone. And by the way, SNAP is not charity. The majority of people who are on SNAP are children, are senior citizens. Of those who are able to work, the majority work. They work, and they earn so little they still qualify for the benefit.

My criticism of SNAP has been that the benefit has been too small. I mean, on average, it is about \$1.40 per person, per meal. My Dunkin Donuts coffee this morning cost me more than that. I mean, I am grateful that in the American Rescue Package we upped it by 15 percent, but talk to food banks and they will tell you that the people who are still coming to food banks midway through the month because their benefits have run out. So, this is not a charity. This is our moral obligation. We all ought to be committed to making sure that nobody in this country is food-insecure or goes hungry. Quite frankly, during the pandemic we saw the numbers go up to like 45 million people who were hungry. Before that it was 35 million. I mean, as a Member of Congress, I am ashamed that so many people in this country don't know where their next meal is going to come from. And the people who are on the program defy stereotypes, and quite frankly, to struggle in this country and to be poor in this country is a lot of work. It is a full-time job.

I really appreciate the testimony of Ms. Wilson and Ms. Davis. I mean, let me just ask you this. Can you both talk about the importance of including people with lived experiences in our conversations about social safety net programs like SNAP? Because I have been on this Committee for a long time, and as Chairman of the Rules Committee, we are doing a series of hearings hopefully leading to a White House conference on food, nutrition, health and hunger. But we have lots of experts that come up and testify, but sometimes they miss things because they, themselves, haven't struggled. They haven't gone through what you have gone through.

Ms. WILSON. I will tell you, to hear you say right now that you understand that we are not people that want to live on food assistance is extremely emotional. For someone to actually understand that we want to do better is extremely emotional. This is not something that we want permanently. As parents, we want to provide for our children but there are circumstances that come into play that sometimes we have to set aside that pride and do what it takes to make sure that our kids don't feel it.

To hear just one person, just one person understand that this isn't what we want, that we're not people who don't want to work, that we're not people who refuse to work is such a breath of fresh air.

I don't really have a whole lot to add to the conversation other than that, but just because I want to validate everything that you are saying. Everything that you are saying is absolutely correct, absolutely correct.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Ms. Davis?

Ms. DAVIS. Yes, I was just going to say I am glad you said that, because I personally was brought up that if you go on government assistance, that you feel like a failure. Like you messed up that you have to go to the government for help. And for me, I had to put my pride to the side to say I need help. And during COVID, I did not have food stamps. I really, really needed help. So, when that P-EBT card—when I found out that I can use that to just pay my meals and stuff, that helped me and relieved some stress so that I did not have to worry about what my son was going to eat during this pandemic. Even though it stopped in November, it still helped

me and I knew when it was going to stop. Then I did the food pantry, and the pantry picked up where they left off.

When people say that, I—it's—no. Because I don't believe on staying on government. I go when I need help, and I know other people that go for help because they need it, not to just be home and do nothing.

Mr. MCGOVERN. and I appreciate you both saying that, because far too often the commentary that comes out of Washington, D.C. does more to stigmatize people than help people get back on their feet.

And so, I appreciate both of you for your courage and for coming and sharing your stories, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and others on this panel.

Thank you very much. I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Mr. McGovern, and he has been a champion on this issue. For anyone who has not already seen it, you should check out the op-ed that he and I co-authored that was released today on this very issue.

[The op-ed referred to is located on p. 63.]

The CHAIRWOMAN. I now recognize the gentlelady from Louisiana for what is your inaugural hearing. Ms. Letlow, please unmute your microphone and ask your questions.

Ms. LETLOW. Thank you, Chairwoman Hayes.

To all the witnesses, thank you for your time and participation in this hearing. I join my colleagues in extending my appreciation to Ms. Davis and Ms. Wilson for providing your testimony and sharing your stories before this Subcommittee.

As the title of this hearing indicates, we are starting to see the country take strides in moving past the pandemic, and this is a timely conversation we are having here today.

My question is for Dr. Whitford. While I am one of the newest Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, it is my understanding that the previous testimony before this Committee has revealed that some organizations expect historically high levels of hunger well beyond this year. It is alarming to hear that even the Federal Reserve is lowering expectations for May's job growth, because companies cannot find individuals able or willing to work. Do you think Congress is providing the right balance of assistance, and what can we do to encourage and help families return to work?

Dr. WHITFORD. We have to—thank you. We have to remember that the only way out of poverty—and I mean, again, in 2 decades you have seen this. The only way out is through work. It is through a job. That is absolutely vital, not only to the dignity of the person—and I mean, we have even heard this just from Ms. Davis and Ms. Wilson. I mean, they recognize that as well. I think we all do. So, we have to be asking ourselves, are we doing anything that is getting in the way of that or not?

There has been talk today about how SNAP is a relief program for emergency use, and that is exactly right. In fact, it reminded me of a book called, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* and in *When Helping Hurts*, they describe three different types of charity, really. There is relief, there is rehabilitation, and there is development. And so many people today are really in the rehabilitation and development

side of that, which requires some sort of effort or work to move forward. Relief should be reserved for the emergency cases when there is no other option. In fact, our community just recognized the 10th anniversary from an F5 tornado that ripped through the center of Joplin. It was of historic significance. It rendered 7,000 people homeless immediately, killed 161 people, and the relief effort was amazing right then. In fact, by the time the Federal Government got involved, we had already organized our community together and we were moving forward.

So, that is relief, but most of the time when we get to know people, they need rehabilitation or development, and it requires effort. It requires work. One thing that we could do what the government could do is just make sure that work requirements are a part of that picture, because we are going to be able to—in fact, in the State of Missouri, we saw 43,000 people who were unemployed and on SNAP benefits before work requirements went back into place in 2016. That number dropped by 85 percent afterwards, and incomes from those folks went up 70 percent. So, again, a job is the way out of poverty. There is no way that we can provide enough aid to lift anybody out of poverty. It will require a job, and the government has got to make sure they are not stepping in the way of that for people who are not in need of relief, real relief, but rehabilitation and development.

Ms. LETLOW. Thank you so much for your answer, Dr. Whitford. I yield back my remaining time.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Ms. Letlow.

I now recognize the gentlelady from Virginia who is on the full Committee, but has waived on to join us today. Welcome to our Subcommittee, Ms. Spanberger. If you can unmute and ask your questions, please.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you so much, Chairwoman Hayes. I appreciate you allowing me to waive on to the Subcommittee today, and I am grateful for you holding this hearing on the future of SNAP.

I represent Virginia, central Virginia 7th District, and in Virginia, nearly 70 percent of SNAP recipients are families with children. And for these families, SNAP has been a vital source of support to put food on the table for their children before and during a global pandemic.

Unfortunately, we have seen such a demand for food assistance that SNAP benefits have been challenged. They are not enough, and food banks across my district in central Virginia have been working tirelessly to meet the needs of hungry Virginians. I have heard from food banks, from state officials, and from members of our community about the immense relief that SNAP assistance can provide a family. And in addition to helping families and children in central Virginia and across the country, SNAP is vital to our nation's economic recovery. As Dr. Bauer mentioned in her testimony, a \$1 investment in SNAP benefits generates about \$1.70 in economic activity during an economic downturn, like the one that we find ourselves in today. And that is why I was so appreciative of our work to ensure that the American Rescue Plan extended increased SNAP benefits through September, as well as the pandemic EBT program.

But we all know that the rate of food insecurity is still higher now than it was before COVID-19, and I am grateful for each of you who are here today to speak with us, and I am so grateful for the stories, the experience, and the expertise that you have brought to Congress.

Dr. Bauer, I would like to begin with you. You mentioned the SNAP Employment and Training Program, also known as SNAP E&T, in your testimony package, and as you know, SNAP participants have exclusive access to training and support services to help them enter the workforce through the SNAP E&T Program.

I was wondering if you could shed a little light on how improving the SNAP E&T Program could potentially help SNAP participants find regular employment?

Dr. BAUER. Certainly. So, I think that there is a lot we can do to synchronize and cohere across the workforce development programs that are supported by the Federal Government, whether it is through SNAP E&T, through programs that are run through the Department of Labor, through WIOA, and certainly through the TANF Program.

There are a variety of ways to support work through the SNAP Program, as I already said, through the earnings disregard, and especially through increasing the EITC and making that more generous more permanently for childless workers because that is really where we are seeing declines and low participation over the long-term.

In terms of E&T, certainly reforms and investments are needed to bulk up the program, especially should work requirements be reinstated at some point in the future when the economy allows it. Even though I don't think that there is evidence to support its continuation, it is certainly helpful to able-bodied adults without dependents to have that E&T slot to help them maintain access to the program, should there still be local area circumstances that limit the number of jobs available.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Thank you very much. Just one more follow up. In your testimony, you mentioned several options for strengthening SNAP as an automatic stabilizer. Could you explain how automatically increasing benefit levels could help ensure that people receive the help they need during a recession while having the impact presumably of stabilizing our economy?

Dr. BAUER. Absolutely.

So, it certainly relates to the point that you made that a dollar of SNAP is a very special Federal dollar, because it generates so much activity and because it is well targeted and spent so quickly. And, when we know the economy is in a recession, which we don't always know as quickly as we knew was going to happen at the start of the pandemic, increasing SNAP benefit levels and reducing barriers to entry to the program will catch people as they fall and help slingshot not only the economy into a self-sustaining recovery, but also help our most vulnerable families when the macro economy is contracting.

Mr. SPANBERGER. Thank you.

Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, from your experience, could you comment on the impacts that multiple Federal nutrition programs have on a

family with SNAP, the School Lunch Program? How do these programs work together to serve a family in need of support?

Dr. BOYNTON-JARRETT. Excellent question, and thank you.

Children receive  $\frac{2}{3}$  of their nutritional daily value actually from the meals they receive at school or in early care and education. So, it is really like the School Meal Program as well as the Summer Meal Program, and those extensions are vitally important for continuity of nutritional meals for children. So, those are very complementary to the SNAP Program.

Moreover, the WIC Program, Women, Infants, and Children, provides healthy nutrition for women who are expecting or who are pregnant. This is critical as well because healthy nutrition during pregnancy actually sets the foundation for a healthy start in life. So, we actually know that adversities that pregnant women face have a longstanding impact on the health and development of children as well. And those studies have actually shown that SNAP benefits and WIC benefits for women who are expecting are associated with reduced risks for metabolic conditions such as diabetes and chronic metabolic conditions in children. So, we know that the earlier we can provide consistency in access to consistent and healthy nutritional foods, the better it is for a healthy development, growth, and learning for children.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Dr. Boynton-Jarrett, thank you so much for making that very clear acknowledgment that the support to pregnant women is so vitally important to healthy babies and supporting babies and young children as they ultimately grow older into community members.

And Madam Chairwoman, thank you for indulging a couple moments over, and I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you, and thank you so much for joining us today. We were happy to have you.

I think that concludes all of our Member questioning. Are there any other Members who have not been heard? Okay.

So, before we adjourn, I invite the Ranking Member to share any closing comments he may have.

Mr. BACON. Thank you very much. I really appreciate the thoughtful conversation. I really appreciate the panelists today, especially those who have their personal stories to share, and I thought it was just very well done.

I have to remember the SNAP Program is a supplementary program, and it is serving well. So, I wanted to make that point. I also realize in the last farm bill that we passed out of the House, we did have some provisions that helped with the cliff effect but it was taken out during conference. I just think we see today from the testimony that we had that there is a need for having an eye on this, and to look how we can mitigate this cliff effect. We heard repeatedly where this has had some impact. So, we have a task in front of us, and there is some bipartisan support to do so.

Finally, just we do need to have an eye for coming out of the pandemic. I know we are not quite there yet, but we are on the tail side of this. We still see increases in poverty, but it has gone down significantly since its peak. We have more work to do.

But we do have to have an eye on the fact that 43 percent of our employers are looking to hire, and they are having a hard time of



this. It is a fact that we have to deal with and we have to ensure that government, not just in the SNAP Program, but all the other areas that it has been involved with over the last 6 months, it is not competing against those jobs. Because in the end, getting people back to work is our goal.

So, with that, Madam Chairwoman, I appreciate your time and I appreciate you organizing this today, and I yield back.

The CHAIRWOMAN. Thank you so much, Representative Bacon.

Before we adjourn, I want to once again thank my colleagues for their participation in today's hearing which will help us to craft lasting, meaningful legislation on this Subcommittee. I especially want to express my sincere thank you to today's panel: both doctors who gave incredible testimony that was very impactful and really shared with us the research, to Dr. Whitford, your perspective and the information that you provided, I promise we will get you those questions that you were not able to answer. And to both Ms. Wilson and Ms. Davis. As the Chairwoman of this Subcommittee, it was very important to me that you tell your own stories, that we found people who could to share your experiences and your perspective, and in essence, rebut the faulty premise that people who can work choose not to. You really have shed a tremendous light on this issue, and really helped us to redefine the faces of the people that we are helping.

I especially want to express my sincere thank you to this panel. Your time and knowledge are extremely valuable, and we appreciate the generosity that you have shown today.

One thing is clear from the testimony today. SNAP has absolutely been an essential support throughout this pandemic, and will continue to be crucial for economic recovery as we climb our way out of it. The work Congress has done to bolster the program and to support related nutrition programs has provided a vital safety net for people who are working hard so that they can support themselves and their family through this extremely difficult time.

We heard from Representative Lawson about the student food insecurity, and he and I just introduced a bill to address that, H.R. 3100, which I look forward to elevating to this Committee as well.

Ms. Wilson started with something very important, pictures of her children. I remind you that many of the people that we are talking about who participate in this program are children. I was a classroom teacher for 15 years before I came to Congress, and the image of children with their heads on the desk who could not learn because they didn't have the energy because they hadn't eaten is something that I wouldn't wish on anyone, and it is something that you will not forget. Those images, those children are the ones who drive my work here today. We are still in a hunger crisis, and our communities still need our help. We have a unique opportunity to take action.

We have heard at times there were no hearings. There was no collaboration on these types of issues. Mr. Bacon, I say to you, we have the ability to change that. Let's work together. Let's use the information that we gathered here today to help get people fed before they have to show up at food banks. Research has shown that for every one person who is fed by a charitable organization, nine

families are fed by SNAP. That is important information for us to know. Let's feed people before they have to stand in line and have the stress of food insecurity.

Thank you again to my colleagues and to the witnesses today for participating in this very important hearing.

I just have some housekeeping things that I have to read. Under the Rules of the Committee, the record of today's hearing will remain open for 10 calendar days to receive additional material and supplementary written responses from the witnesses to any questions posed by a Member.

This hearing of the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:23 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

SUBMITTED ARTICLE BY HON. JAHANA HAYES, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CONNECTICUT

[<https://civileats.com/2021/05/26/op-ed-hunger-is-a-political-decision-we-can-work-to-end-it/>]



CIVIL EATS

**Op-Ed: Hunger is a Political Decision. We Can Work to End It.**

Members of the House Agriculture Committee call for a substantive, policy-based conference focused on ending hunger in the U.S. by 2030.

By JAMES MCGOVERN<sup>1</sup> and JAHANA HAYES<sup>2</sup>

May 26, 2021



New data from the U.S. Census Bureau<sup>3</sup> shows that while hunger in America is still surging far above pre-pandemic levels, Congressional aid is making a difference. This is welcome news for a country that has seen lines at food banks stretching on for miles and too many families going without food.

It is also a reminder that hunger is not inevitable—it's a policy choice.

Even before the pandemic, over 40 million Americans experienced food insecurity. While Congress has made significant and important progress to address hunger during the COVID pandemic through *landmark investments*<sup>4</sup> in nutrition programs, we believe it's time to take the next step. That's why we are calling for the White House to hold a substantive, policy-based conference focused on ending hunger throughout the United States by 2030.

The last and only White House conference on hunger was held in 1969—the same year we landed a man on the moon.

<sup>1</sup> <https://civileats.com/author/jmcgovern/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://civileats.com/author/jahanahayes/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/number-of-families-struggling-to-afford-food-rose-steeply-in-pandemic-and>.

**Editor's note:** this article is also retained in Committee file.

<sup>4</sup> <https://frac.org/covid19>.

While far from perfect, the conference was *responsible*<sup>5</sup> for the creation and expansion of vital anti-hunger safety net programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

More than 50 years later, we believe now is the time to think holistically and improve our coordination across an array of social service programs, bringing into focus both the successes and the failures of Federal programs. Who is falling through the cracks? What more needs to be done? These are questions we need to address with new solutions.

The pandemic has made the need for Federal programs beyond food assistance clearer than ever. Unemployment benefits, housing, affordable childcare, healthcare, and tax credits are all critical supports for families under stress. Together, these programs and policies all help address hunger. The problem though, is that they span across many programs, agencies, and levels of government.

Imagine the progress that could be achieved today if the heads of food banks, hospitals, government agencies, nonprofits, educators, and the faith-based community all came together at the same table, and worked together with the White House to solve our hunger crisis in a holistic way. They could develop a real plan with actionable benchmarks to help us end the crisis by 2030, as the United Nations *has called for*.<sup>6</sup>

This conference should improve on the 1969 conference in one in a key way: it should include a diverse group of Americans who have experienced hunger first-hand. Such perspective is vital to ensuring our policies are centered on the real experiences of everyday people, not just numbers and statistics.

Congress has been doing its part to fight food insecurity. In March 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 emergency response, it agreed to increase SNAP benefits so families could stock up and prepare for quarantine. Then, as the pandemic impact increased, Democrats were able to secure an additional 15 percent monthly increase in SNAP benefits for the duration of the pandemic.

Programs like Pandemic EBT, WIC, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program are also helping many Americans. Recent legislation has also provided additional funding and resources to these programs.

As chairs in the House, we have been working to make addressing hunger a national priority.

The Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations has been playing a vital role ensuring hunger is part of our ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. It has advanced investments in the SNAP program, spearheaded expansion of online food purchasing, ensured food banks had the resources they needed to meet increased demand, and provided oversight as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has implemented these historic undertakings.

The House Rules Committee has also begun a series of groundbreaking anti-hunger hearings to learn from and uplift a diverse chorus of voices so that when the Biden Administration is ready to hold a hunger conference, they can hit the ground running to help shape the dialogue.

But Congress can not end hunger alone. We must bring the full weight of the Federal Government to bear.

Every single person living in this country deserves to wake up each day without having to worry about where their next meal will come from. We have the food, the knowledge, and the resources to guarantee food security for every person in America. A White House conference on hunger would help us take a vital step forward in building the political will to end this crisis once and for all.

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SUBMITTED LETTER BY HON. JAHANA HAYES, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CONNECTICUT; ON BEHALF OF HANNAH WALKER, VICE PRESIDENT, POLITICAL AFFAIRS, FMI—THE FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

May 25, 2021

Hon. JAHANA HAYES,  
*Chairwoman*,  
 House Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations,  
 Washington, D.C.;

<sup>5</sup><https://sites.tufts.edu/foodnutritionandhealth2019/1969-white-house-conference/>.

<sup>6</sup><https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal2>.

Hon. DON BACON,  
*Ranking Minority Member,*  
 House Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations  
 Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairwoman Hayes and Ranking Member Bacon:

FMI—The Food Industry Association respectfully requests to have this letter included in the record for the hearing on May 26, 2021 entitled, “The Future of SNAP: Moving Past the Pandemic.” FMI and our members, which include food retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers, are committed to building upon the success of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure it continues to serve families in need across our country.

As you know, the grocery industry is the private partner with the Federal Government serving as the redemption point for SNAP beneficiaries. The program was designed to be able to ramp up quickly in times of need and cause almost no disruption in-store, allowing families to redeem their benefits where they have traditionally shopped for groceries regardless of how they pay. SNAP participation increased by over 14%, or six million people, from February 2020 to February 2021. Congress and USDA took extraordinary efforts to increase and maximize benefits for families, and the investment paid off. Of the \$78 billion in SNAP spending last year, over 95% went directly to benefits. The program proved to be flexible and extremely efficient even in the most challenging of circumstances.

The work on SNAP did not end with increased participation and benefits. The Agency and industry worked closely to improve access along the way. Prior to last March, USDA was rolling out a SNAP online pilot in a few states. By the end of 2020, 47 states and the District of Columbia had enabled SNAP online. While this was great and shows quick progress, much work remains on increasing authorized online SNAP retailers. The process and technical requirements for a retailer to become authorized to accept SNAP online is challenging and complex. Retailers have been sharing best practices and lessons learned amongst themselves, however, many challenges remain. FMI is looking forward to USDA implementing the provisions from the recently signed into law American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which allocates resources for the Agency to provide technical assistance to retailers.

Looking forward, the food industry is keenly focused on finding additional opportunities to address hunger and nutrition here in the U.S. all while maintaining the efficiencies and successes of SNAP. The grocery industry prides itself on transparency and helping the consumer make food selections reflective of their individual family needs. The food industry provides these services to all their customers regardless of how they pay, be it cash, check, SNAP or credit. Over the past decade, grocers have hired dietitians, nutritionists, in-store chefs and pharmacists to assist customers in making food selections. These services are keenly important when a customer is newly diagnosed with health conditions and diseases that may require changes to diet. As we previously mentioned, SNAP allows the customer to continue shopping at their neighborhood store and make choices on foods that meet their specific needs.

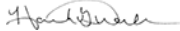
Additionally, several FMI members are currently participating in the GUSNIP, fruit and vegetable incentives program. GUSNIP is a voluntary program that requires significant investment by the retailer and is just one of many ways our members serve their customers every day while surviving on less than a 3% average annual profit margin.

FMI firmly believes in finding ways to help all consumers eat well and make appropriate choices for their families regardless of how they pay. Unfortunately, efforts to further restrict items families can purchase with SNAP will only increase retailers’ cost to comply and accept SNAP, with a possible chilling effect on some, particularly smaller grocers’ ability to participate in the program. Additionally, it would complicate the shopping experience for customers without truly addressing or changing eating habits.

Technology can both help customers in the actual shopping experience, but also improve the checkout process. Today, we enjoy a ubiquitous SNAP Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system. Retailers can accept a SNAP card issued in any state regardless of where they are located. This efficiency of scale functions as originally designed reflecting both the need for uniformity on behalf of the retailer, and access for customers. Any attempt to remove that ubiquity will remove all the efficiencies we have worked to gain over the past 3 decades, increase the costs of the program and most concerning—threaten access for the customer. Instead, FMI advocates for further building on the success of the EBT system with a focus on reliability in the processor space and innovation to allow for mobile checkout and future developments in payments.

FMI commends the Subcommittee for its interest in and commitment to SNAP. Working together, we will succeed in finding new opportunities to build on the success of the program and make it stronger moving forward.

Sincerely,



HANNAH WALKER,  
Vice President, Political Affairs,  
FMI—The Food Industry Association.

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SUBMITTED STATEMENT BY HON. DON BACON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM NEBRASKA; ON BEHALF OF INMAR, INC.

### Introduction

Inmar is pleased to submit testimony for today's hearing on the future of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP").

Inmar believes the challenges posed by the [COVID]-19 pandemic to the nation's nutrition safety net have put into stark relief the need to modernize the country's nutrition assistance programs as well as modernize disaster relief benefit distribution. The current electronic benefit transfer ("EBT") system results in inefficiencies, greater opportunities for fraud, and lost opportunities to enhance, and stretch, program benefits. By incorporating and leveraging new technologies, the programs could enhance efficiency and program integrity, reduce fraud, and most importantly expand and maximize program benefits for participants.

As Congress reviews nutrition assistance programs in preparation for reauthorization of the next farm bill, we encourage policymakers to consider the inclusion of legislative language that would facilitate modernization of the programs through the adoption of these new technologies. We further encourage policymakers to consider how to eliminate barriers to enhanced utilization of technology, and barriers to entry by host processors which have the technological capability to bring improved program administration to the table. In particular, we encourage consideration of four changes: (1) enable all participants in the SNAP program to participate using digital platforms, (2) enable digital delivery of disaster benefits, (3) eliminate rules, while well-intentioned, that serve to limit the ability of technologically-capable processors to enhance benefits and stretch SNAP dollars, and (4) eliminate false barriers to entry for host processors which bring innovative consumer and beneficiary-driven solutions to market.

### Inmar Overview

Inmar is a leader in data-driven technology solutions and business and government program enablement, bringing more than 35 years of private industry solution experience to the public-sector. We develop technology and use advanced data analytics to improve outcomes for consumers and beneficiaries.

Beginning with our efforts in the private-sector to help businesses operate more efficiently in serving customers, our time-proven solutions help organizations of all kinds successfully address critical financial, operational, and mission-centric challenges. Government departments, agencies and services rely on Inmar to facilitate their revenue recovery, inventory management, business analytics and consumer-facing technology programs. Of note, this includes demonstrably successful and replicable implementation of the SNAP program in Louisiana.

Headquartered in the Wake Forest Innovation Quarter in Winston-Salem, Inmar employs more than 4,500 associates in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, California, Florida, Louisiana, and New York.

### Benefits of a Digital Benefits Delivery Program for SNAP

Under existing law, the SNAP program functions effectively as an EBT program, making the provision of vital benefits for millions of at-risk Americans reliant on antiquated analogue technology. All SNAP beneficiaries should have the option to receive benefits and participate in the program through digital technology. This can take the form of a phone app that beneficiaries could opt to use instead of an analogue card. For those wishing to use them, cards would still be honored throughout the program. We believe that use of secure digital technology to deliver SNAP benefits provides Federal and state program administrators with the means to extend program dollars for participants, increase program access, raise nutritional awareness and assist with the adoption of healthier eating lifestyles. At the same time, it would also reduce fraud and abuse, enhance program integrity, and reduce administrative costs. Modern technology also provides critical interoperability across pub-

lic programs that can be configured to meet Protected Health Information (PHI) and data security standards. Pursuant to proving out this enhanced approach to program administration, we encourage Congress to fully fund, and for USDA to move quickly to award, mobile technologies demonstration projects authorized under Section 7(h)(14) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. § 2016(h)(14)).

Central to the success of a digitally enabled benefit distribution system would be the utilization of an e-wallet by program participants. Beneficiaries would use their e-wallet to receive and access their monthly benefit dollars, as well as have the option to opt-in to receive digital coupons, offered as required under current law. Program participants would access their e-wallets by login via PC or mobile device, and have immediate access to their benefits balance as well as any, and all, coupons available to them. These coupons would be offered by a variety of sources including both retailers and manufacturers and, potentially, participating states or other government entities.

Purchases made by SNAP shoppers would be validated against a cloud-based list at checkout to determine each product's eligibility for payment by SNAP. This UPC-level validation happens in real-time, is executed in the Cloud, and would help mitigate fraud and reduce costly retailer audits. This process, utilizing modern technology *versus* antiquated EBT cards, would provide automatic 100% validation with limited man-hours and diminished costs, in contrast to the more labor and cost intensive current audit process that audits only a small percentage of retailers, and almost certainly fails to fully identify fraud and abuse in the program.

The ready availability of targeted relevant offers would help SNAP shoppers stretch their benefit dollars to promote healthier food choices moving them towards healthier lifestyles. To redeem these coupons, SNAP shoppers would use a card or unique identifier linked to their e-wallets at check out which would automatically apply discounts to qualified purchases and would activate drawdown of SNAP benefits. While healthier food choices are available to SNAP constituents, the truth is they often cannot afford, nor are they effectively incentivized, to purchase more nutritional food and beverages for themselves and their families. At Inmar, we believe that, in order for FNS to successfully address this two-fold challenge to better public health and nutrition, it is essential that digital technology, supported by data analytics and data-driven engagement strategies, be deployed to motivate and enable SNAP participants in making healthier shopping decisions while effectively providing them additional monthly dollars beyond appropriated benefit budgets.

Appropriate deployment of these capabilities will help SNAP recipients stretch their benefit dollars, increase their spending power and empower them to make more nutritious food purchases while, at the same time, improving the program's security for fraud prevention and program efficiency. This enhanced operation would in turn, reduce administrative costs at both the Federal and state levels.

***We encourage policymakers to examine ways to modernize the SNAP program to facilitate the adoption and leveraging of modern digital technology for the benefit of recipients.***

**Benefits to USDA and FNS:**

- Full utilization of program dollars
- More efficient validation and administration of programs
  - 100% SNAP eligibility verification of transactions
  - 100% fraud-free digital coupons automatically applied to purchases
  - Ongoing retailer audits with reduced audit costs
  - Easier retailer validation/investigations to decrease retail trafficking
  - Automated product eligibility confirmation eliminating retailer error
- Data delivery and analysis to assist USDA in realizing healthier outcomes for program participants
- Data Analytics to support evidence-based programs and data transparency requirements
- Greatly-enhanced prevention and detection of fraud and abuse
- Cost savings and enhanced security associated with electronic delivery of D-SNAP benefits

**Benefits to SNAP Recipients:**

- Fast and easy benefits delivery to SNAP recipients via mobile app
- Secure benefits redemption for SNAP recipients without the need for a card

- Digital coupons help stretch monthly benefits with the ability to apply savings to healthier food purchases
- Additional cost-saving incentives for healthier purchases
- No-cost digital account access for balance inquiries and coupon acquisition
- Greater nutrition awareness and guidance on healthier purchases through access to engagement tools
- Streamlined transactions saving time and effort while also protecting participants' dignity at checkout
- Ability to be used by all retail channels including Farmers['] Markets
- Relevant shopper engagement to increase SNAP benefit utilization
- Immediate access to D-SNAP benefits after disasters eliminating delays associated with card distribution

#### **Electronic Benefit Delivery for D-SNAP**

America is facing a health and economic crisis with rising food insecurity due to the pandemic. 43 million Americans are in need of nutrition assistance—without a disaster. The number of people needing assistance can soar when disaster hits. The pandemic has changed behaviors and accelerated e-commerce and digital initiatives. The need for this modernization and efficient delivery of benefits is all the more urgent when disaster hits a community and state and local governments are charged with supporting residents as they rebuild and return to normal daily living.

D-SNAP, which provides temporary food assistance for households affected by a natural disaster, is a critical part of a comprehensive government response when disaster strikes. Currently, when confronting disasters, typical practice is for states to issue plastic cards to eligible individuals. Most states set up a remote site and distribute cards (if an adequate inventory is available) in person. Depending on the type of disaster, this may or may not be possible, and as [COVID] has demonstrated, it is often challenging to establish or it might not be practical if the disaster could be classified as a pandemic and requires the avoidance or minimization of contact among individuals. In this case, cards are typically mailed to constituents. This can be a challenge for multiple reasons; access to residences may be impossible due to damage to access roads, or damage to the facility that would assist in the distribution may have been damaged, or roads may be inaccessible and require time for clearing. Electronic delivery of benefits could provide significant cost savings for site operations as well as reduce safety concerns associated with in person registration and distribution.

A digitally enabled D-SNAP benefit distribution system would allow beneficiaries to receive and access their D-SNAP benefits without the need of a physical card. Program participants would access their e-wallets by login via PC or mobile device, and have immediate access to their benefits balance, eliminating delays associated with EBT card distribution as well as provide a direct channel of communication with beneficiaries in a disaster situation. Additional benefits of a virtual D-SNAP program would be realized with pre-registration of populations by zip code. With pre-registration states could push out notifications to constituents when disaster is pending. States can also use this information to quickly estimate the number of impacted citizens to help inform overall disaster recovery planning as well as estimate necessary funding based upon a more reliable number of affected citizens. With pre-registration, once the state identifies the eligible population, it can disperse funds quicker than mail service making benefits available immediately after a disaster has been declared. Information is critical for effective disaster management. **The utilization of electronic benefit delivery could be vital for disaster relief and should be examined by the funding of pilot programs.**

#### **Rules Inadvertently Limiting SNAP Program Enhancement**

While we recognize and appreciate rules and regulations that serve to protect SNAP beneficiaries from predatory practices, rules such as those that limit coupon availability to beneficiaries need to be re-examined. Such well-intentioned laws cannot be reconciled with the inadvertent impact of preventing retailers and manufacturers and, potentially, participating states or other government entities, from offering further price reductions on products to beneficiaries in order to stretch the SNAP dollar and enhance nutritional outcomes.

Additionally, current rules and regulations prevent processors and other parties from analyzing data generated through administration of the SNAP program. These restrictions are designed to protect beneficiaries' personal information, which in turn of course supports. However, accessing and analyzing anonymized data would allow processors to provide additional benefits to recipients. For example, many SNAP recipients live in food deserts or food swamps where healthy and affordable SNAP-



eligible foods are often limited. A processor would be able to inform a SNAP-recipient consumer what other stores may be available for them to purchase the same items at better prices, or where they might find affordable and healthier options. It would also enable processors to leverage relationships with food manufacturers and retailers to help meet unmet demand by SNAP recipients for certain products, including affordable and healthier options. This would help recipients stretch their SNAP dollar and potentially provide a greater number of affordable and healthy food options.

**While we appreciate the public policy underpinning these rules, they should be re-examined to permit companies and other entities to provide enhanced benefits to SNAP recipients through coupons and offers, that serve to enhance the SNAP dollar. We also encourage the re-examination of other restrictions and limitations that serve to limit the ability to leverage modern and proven technology for the benefit of recipients. We respectfully encourage Congress and USDA to reconsider these restrictions.**

#### **Barriers to Entry in Host Processor Market**

Currently, two companies dominate the host processor market. These two companies serve as host processors for all but two of fifty states (Louisiana, with Inmar serving as host contractor, being one of the two exceptions). This lack of competition in the market results in fewer options and higher fees for state agencies. It also serves to stifle innovation. USDA, under the leadership of Secretary Vilsack, is on record as being interested in identifying ways to stimulate increased competition in the EBT marketplace and identify procurement or systems features that are barriers to new entrants (see Notice; Request for Information, 80 *Fed. Reg.* 35932 (June 23, 2015)).

With so few companies in the market, technological innovation is limited and agencies lack options. As USDA has stated, healthy competition in the host processor marketplace helps to control costs, ensure a level playing field for businesses who are interested in supporting benefit delivery processes, and encourage innovation. As USDA further stated, limited competition within the marketplace increases the risk for sustainability of the industry over time, and limited competition could affect pricing. Inmar echoes those concerns, but despite a general consensus that more host processors should be in the market, two companies continue to dominate state agency contract awards.

Inmar is confident that its successful and innovative administration of the SNAP and TANF programs as host processor for the State of Louisiana will further establish it as a market competitor. However, companies such as Inmar that are able to bring greater efficiencies, enhanced administration, and technological solutions that can be leveraged to benefit program recipients are still at an artificial market disadvantage. Many state agencies have stated and unstated rules giving preference to legacy processors. We encourage policymakers to consider whether there might be legislative solutions to encourage new entrants to the marketplace. States need not require new entrants to have 10 years of service in the analogue EBT program, as that says little about their ability to execute in a modern environment and provide the benefits of operating on a digital platform. **We therefore encourage policymakers to consider ways to facilitate the elimination of false barriers, designed to protect legacy processors, to new innovators and disrupters, who can leverage proven technologies to enhance benefits and outcomes for a beneficiary-focused solution.**

#### **Conclusion**

Inmar appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony for today's hearing on the future of the SNAP program and we look forward to working with the Subcommittee to help effect improvements to USDA's nutrition assistance programs. In the best of times, SNAP serves a vital lifeline for millions of at-risk Americans. During an unprecedented time like the COVID-19 crisis, the program has been a vital lifeline connecting America's producers with America's most vulnerable populations and leveraging America's unmatched food production system to align with the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL SUBMITTED BY JAMES WHITFORD, D.P.T., CO-FOUNDER  
AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WATERED GARDENS MINISTRIES

#### **Insert**

Ms. ADAMS. . . .

Dr. Whitford, in your testimony you imply that SNAP and Federal assistance programs of charity have no place in government. I respectfully wholly disagree. SNAP and our Federal safety net programs are a hand-up, not a hand-out, and many of us on this Committee once utilized the program.

So, do you believe that private charities and nonprofits could immediately and effectively provide for the 42 million Americans who are currently supported by SNAP?

Dr. WHITFORD. That is a great question.

June 4, 2021

To the Chair[woman] and Members of the Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations Subcommittee:

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony at the recent hearing on May 26, *The Future of Snap: Moving Past the Pandemic*.

I'm taking the opportunity to respond to Vice Chair Adams' question in writing since her time had expired prior to my response. The question was, "Do you believe that private charities and nonprofits could immediately and effectively provide for the 42 million Americans who are currently supported by SNAP?"

Thank you for the question Vice Chair Adams and I'm sorry our time didn't allow me to respond while we were together virtually.

In one regard, the question encourages me—if the number of Americans dependent on SNAP were low enough, might you be favorable toward such an idea?! If that is indeed the case, then it stands to reason you may also be in favor of the program's privatization if there were enough private nonprofits and churches who could do the job. We should hope!

Even though I have no doubt of the private-sector's capacity to feed the hungry in America, I certainly assert that "immediately" and "effectively" are mutually exclusive. We could do so "immediately and chaotically" but a thoughtful and effective plan would require time. That said, I am hopeful we can all agree that one American or 42 million Americans "supported by SNAP" is not optimal and that our common ground upon which to rally together is to see as few people as possible supported by the government. This reminds me of some words written by one of my favorite Presidents, Democrat Grover Cleveland, when he vetoed the Texas Seed Bill of 1887:

*"A prevalent tendency to disregard the limited mission of this [government] power and duty should be steadfastly resisted, to the end that the lesson should be constantly enforced that, though the people support the Government, the Government should not support the people."*

In further justifying his dissent, he pointed to the great strength of American charity, demonstrating his remarkable and beautiful faith in the generosity and neighborliness of American citizens. He also commented on the risk "Federal aid" poses to the bonds between people.

*"The friendliness and charity of our countrymen can always be relied upon to relieve their fellow-citizens in misfortune. This has been repeatedly and quite lately demonstrated. Federal aid in such cases encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character, while it prevents the indulgence among our people of that kindly sentiment and conduct which strengthens the bonds of a common brotherhood."*

There are other great thinkers who saw the danger of people "supported" by government programs. In Alexis de Tocqueville's observations of American life in *Democracy in America*, he recorded his amazement of Americans' tendencies to associate. He foresaw the growth of government and the threat it would pose to those natural, communal relationships, writing:

*"The task of the governing power will therefore perpetually increase, and its very efforts will extend it every day. The more it stands in the place of associations, the more will individuals, losing the notion of combining together, require its assistance."*

My intent here is not a history lesson. I simply argue that throughout American history, whether a Democrat President or a French philosopher, leaders have realized that "support" on the Federal Government has a myriad of disruptive effects that adversely impact the natural affiliations within family and community.

To continue examining private-sector capacity, I am not able to estimate the reduction of SNAP enrollees if effective and empowering charity took over. Certainly,

without the current and easy path to liquidate and abuse the benefit, not to mention the attrition of able-bodied adults who take advantage of the program unnecessarily, there would be a significant reduction representing a more accurate and true need for food.

One church in my city partnered with an organization called the Pack Shack who facilitates “funnel parties.” The entire church assembled on a Sunday and instead of a sermon, they packed 40,000 meals during their normal two service times. These meals are dry-stored, nutritious and they even taste good. I know—it’s a drop in the bucket, but it was one church on one Sunday. There are approximately 380,000 churches in the United States. If half of them did the same just twice per year, it would provide a meal to each of those 42 million people every day.

Even my small mission provides more than 60,000 hot meals each year and nearly that in additional pounds of food for families in need. Our mission is just one of more than 300 in the Citygate Network of missions that prepare and serve more than 50 million meals annually.

I’m sure you’re grateful for the hard work of these amazing compassionate soldiers fighting for social justice. I also imagine you would love to see people fed and cared for by their neighbors, local churches and communities. If so, then you would naturally hope SNAP to be merely “supplemental” to what’s being provided by those more meaningful sources. Unfortunately, it’s not. An unemployed homeless man yesterday shared a letter with me sent to him from our state’s DSS office regarding his SNAP benefits. It reads, “The amount of benefits you will continue to receive are: \$234.00 thru 05/2022.” Certainly, you’d agree this amount is more than “supplemental” for a man who is being fed by the mission where he currently resides. Certainly, this indicates the number 42 million is woefully inflated compared to real need.

No less important than my confidence in private charity to meet the true need is the assumption I perceive behind the question you asked. The use of that overwhelming number, 42 million, causes most minds to quickly couple quantity with justification. However, the number of people subscribing to any sort of thing does not necessitate its justification, regardless of the quantity who subscribe. If it were not so, then communism could be justified by the number of communists or mob-rule by the quantity of the mob. If we so readily justify USDA’s SNAP program, we must also toss out, among many other things, those valid and thoughtful arguments put forth by a few of our Founders in the *Federalist Papers* as they argued for a Federal Government but assured a newly liberated people that it would never grow beyond its enumerated powers. In number 41, Madison reassures us:

*For what purpose could the enumeration of particular powers be inserted, if these and all others were meant to be included in the preceding general power? Nothing is more natural nor common than first to use a general phrase, and then to explain and qualify it by a recital of particulars.*

And in number 45:

*The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the Federal Government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the state governments are numerous and indefinite.*

As radical as it may seem to anyone in our culture today, I believe more justified than any government program is the expectation that the Federal Government should restrain itself to that list of “few and defined” powers. It is not so much that I argue for diminishing government as it is that I desire to magnify people. However, the more power the government holds, the less the people are empowered. Empowerment does not come by the simple transfer of wealth, but at the moment a person realizes he or she can create it for himself. So, the more the government grows in its unmerited transfer of wealth to the poor, the less the poor person will find the flourishing life and freedom for which he or she was created. Certainly, none of us should embrace such a perversion of justice.

I am not asking you to close the SNAP program tomorrow. I only hope you’ll consider that the involvement of the Federal Government in helping people in my community has also brought its share of hurt. At least, I ask you to consider the following:

- Do not expand the program as our economy regains its footing.
- Require work from able-bodied adults without dependents.
- Seriously consider how the program could be turned over to the states.

Last, please remember that the excellence of our nation stems in great part from its establishment as a republic. We were never intended to, nor should we be a na-

tion ruled by mob nor by an elite aristocracy, but by the people. In his letter to John Taylor in 1816, Thomas Jefferson wrote;

*“The further the departure from direct and constant control by the citizens, the less has the government of the ingredient of republicanism.”*

Thank you for working with me to realize a grander America in which we have rightfully returned to the citizenry’s direct and constant control that which it does best; love and care for neighbors in need.

#### SUBMITTED QUESTIONS

##### **Response from Lauren Lowenstein Bauer, Ph.D., Fellow in Economic Studies, The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institution**

*Question Submitted by Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, a Delegate in Congress from Northern Mariana Islands*

*Question.* In your testimony you recommend automatically increasing SNAP benefit levels and ensuring the program expands during a recession to reduce food insecurity. What are your thoughts on the benefits of applying these reforms to the capped nutrition block grant to the Marianas by transitioning into SNAP like the fifty states, Guam and the Virgin Islands? Shouldn’t the same safety net protections be available for people in the Marianas as other Americans, including in Guam and the Virgin Islands?

*Answer.* Current Block Grant Nutrition Assistance Programs (NAP) do not expand with changes in the number of households that are eligible. Generally, NAP does not allow for expansions or restrictions to nutrition assistance because it is not an entitlement program and is subject to a yearly budget constraint. Furthermore, any nutrition disaster relief response in the U.S. territories must be completed through acts of Congress, leading to delays in emergency nutrition assistance.

The responsiveness to changing conditions on the ground is important not only for recessions, but in cases when Disaster-SNAP may be operative. NAP prevents the necessary quick response to natural disaster nutrition assistance that SNAP adequately provides. According to a report by the Food and Nutrition Service following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico, “FNS and the Puerto Rican Government was not able to distribute essential disaster nutrition grant funding to survivors in Puerto Rico until 6 months after the hurricanes” (USDA 2019).<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, “the Virgin Islands, which participates in SNAP and can provide assistance through the Disaster SNAP program, was able to provide assistance . . . only 47 days after Hurricane Maria” (CBPP 2020).<sup>2</sup>

NAP covers a much smaller share of eligible households than in the fifty states and the District of Columbia and the amount of assistance that households receive is also typically smaller in order to stretch the budgeted resources. The block grant structure is inadequate to meet need at every point in the business cycle. I believe the evidence supports transitioning those places currently covered by NAP to SNAP.

*Question Submitted by Hon. Salud O. Carbajal, a Representative in Congress from California*

*Question.* One of the main ways we can make sure SNAP fulfills its mission to fight hunger is ensure that the benefit is adequate.

Often, SNAP recipients still rely on food banks and other supports to make ends meet for their families.

Like much of our country, rural areas of my Central Coast District face specific challenges such as costs to travel to get food, or other hardships.

Dr. Bauer, how can we make sure that the SNAP allotment reflects the time and financial costs families face to purchase their groceries, and what other changes would you recommend to make sure families have a benefit adequate to meet their need for food?

*Answer.* The goals of safety net programs are to provide insurance protection to those who are experiencing poor economic outcomes and to support those who are trying to improve their situation. SNAP ensures that eligible participants and families have access to food when they have no- or low-income. The value of the SNAP benefits that a household receives is a function of three factors: how much USDA

<sup>1</sup>[https://bvirtualogp.pr.gov/ogp/Bvirtual/reogGubernamental/PDF/Informes\\_y\\_Estudios/277002.pdf](https://bvirtualogp.pr.gov/ogp/Bvirtual/reogGubernamental/PDF/Informes_y_Estudios/277002.pdf).<sup>†</sup>

**Editor’s note:** citations annotated with † are retained in Committee file.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/how-does-household-food-assistance-in-puerto-rico-compare-to-the-rest-of>.<sup>†</sup>

determines it minimally costs to achieve a healthy diet, how much money a household has available to purchase groceries, and what share of that available money the government expects a household to spend on groceries. The maximum SNAP allotment is based on the Thrifty Food Plan (the Thrifty), a minimal-cost model food plan for a healthy diet that is based on the cost of purchasing foods consumed by the “reference family,” a male and female aged 19–50, a child aged 6–8, and a child aged 9–11. The maximum benefits can be dialed up and down for different household sizes. While the lower 48 states have the same maximum benefit, Alaska, Hawaii, and the territories that participate in SNAP have different maximums. Households with positive net income are expected to contribute 30 percent of that income toward groceries. Households that have no net income receive the maximum benefit for their household’s size.

Because households that have no resources to contribute to the purchase of groceries receive the maximum benefit, the maximum benefit, *i.e.*, the Thrifty, has to be sufficient to meet their food needs. While there is evidence that SNAP is effective across many dimensions—lifting millions out of poverty, supporting work, economic security, and self-sufficiency, reducing food insecurity, and improving health and education outcomes—the value of the SNAP maximum benefit is not sufficient to provide adequate nutrition assistance for eligible households.

The 2018 Farm Bill states that the Thrifty should be “based on current food prices, food composition data, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance.” It also newly requires a recalculation every 5 years, adding additional weight to the Congressional prerogative that the Thrifty be regularly updated in order to incorporate “current” inputs.

The Congressional mandate regarding “current” inputs is in conflict with an arbitrary administrative rule, the constant cost constraint (*i.e.*, the maximum cost allotment for age-gender groups). The constant cost constraint distorts the formula in contravention to the Congressionally-mandated “current” inputs and is not required in law as part of the construction of the Thrifty.

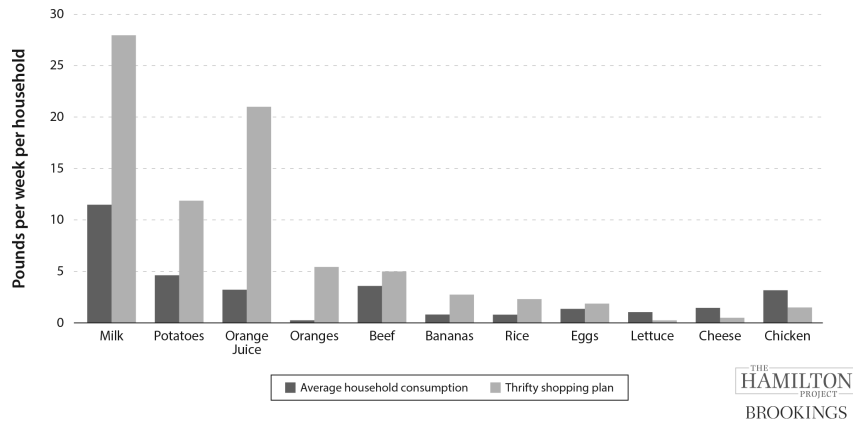
According to the constant cost constraint, the total cost of an age-gender market basket must remain constant to the original value of the emergency use only Economy Plan and can only be adjusted for inflation. Because the constant cost constraint holds the total value of The Thrifty constant in real terms, the market baskets are forced to skew away from actual consumption patterns to simulated consumption patterns far outside norms, making it less likely that participants have sufficient resources to purchase and consume a healthy diet.

*Figure 1* illustrates how the constant constraint works. The constant cost constraint causes significant and self-evident deviation from actual consumption patterns toward the unrealistic consumption of particular raw ingredients. In order to satisfy the constant cost constraint, the Thrifty requires the consumption of more than 20 pounds of orange juice (plus an additional 5 pounds of oranges), 12 pounds of potatoes, 28 pounds of milk, and so forth. Models that loosen the constant cost constraint reduce these disparities.<sup>[iii]</sup> Through the review process, the U.S. Department of Agriculture in partnership with the Office of Management and Budget may eliminate (or relax) the constant cost constraint. Doing so would allow the Congressionally-mandated inputs to update to “current” the total value of the Thrifty.

<sup>[iii]</sup> Wilde, P.E. and Llobera, J. (2009), *Using the Thrifty Food Plan to Assess the Cost of a Nutritious Diet*. JOURNAL OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, 43: 274–304.

**Editor’s note:** the response from Dr. Bauer did not include the reference [i], it has been reproduced herein as submitted.

**Figure 1**  
**Average Household Consumption vs. Thrifty Shopping Plan**



consumption patterns of SNAP households and even farther away from the consumption patterns of *food-secure* SNAP households.

There are several ways to improve the construction of the consumption patterns input:

- Within NHANES, selecting a population sample that that reflects food-secure SNAP households;
- Incorporate time use data from the American Time Use Survey using the same population sample in NHANES as part of the consumption patterns calculation to account for the cost of food preparation time; and/or,
- Use the National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS) data in addition to or in place of Nielsen data.

These changes would go a long way in ensuring that SNAP households receive adequate benefits.

**Response from Odessa Davis; on behalf of No Kid Hungry Campaign, Share our Strength**

*Question Submitted by Hon. Salud O. Carbajal, a Representative in Congress from California*

*Question.* One of the most crucial changes to SNAP during the pandemic was the temporary expansions for college students, allowing students who are eligible for work study or have no Expected Family Contribution to apply for SNAP if they need help with their groceries.

The expansion is tied to the public health emergency, but we know that students will need help with food so they can learn & complete their degrees long after COVID.

Ms. Davis, what can we do to ensure the SNAP is there to serve low-income college students?

*Answer.* Getting a college education is really important. It is also really hard to stay in school when you are juggling working and raising a child at the same time and trying to figure out how to pay all your bills. Congress can help make it easier for people like me and my fellow student parents to graduate by making sure SNAP is available to us.

One way to increase access to SNAP among college students who are struggling financially is to continue the eligibility expansions put in place during COVID. That would allow students who are eligible for work study or whose families don't have resources to help receive SNAP.

SNAP can be really confusing to figure out. Having colleges hire people to help eligible students apply for SNAP and WIC could make a big difference.

Finally, SNAP benefits are really low and it's hard to afford healthy food. Increasing the amount of benefits would help everyone on SNAP, including college students.

**Response from Renée, Boynton-Jarrett, M.D., Sc.D., Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine; Pediatrician, Boston Medical Center; Founder and Executive Director, Vital Village Networks**

*Question Submitted by Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan, a Delegate in Congress from Northern Mariana Islands*

*Question.* In your testimony you note that when children lack access to necessities like nutritious food, even for a brief period of time—their health is jeopardized. Last year, our governor removed families from nutrition assistance due to lack of funds from the block grant. From a health standpoint, would you agree that children in these families would be best served under SNAP, where funding isn't capped, than the block grant model?

*Answer.* I would agree that children are best served under SNAP as an entitlement program, where funding is not capped as it would be in a block grant.

Research has consistently shown that household food insecurity has a significant and enduring impact on child health and development.<sup>[16]</sup> Children in food-insecure households are more likely to be in poor health, be hospitalized, at-risk of developmental delays, and experiencing difficulties learning in school.<sup>[16–18]</sup> Household food insecurity, even if at marginal levels, is associated with adverse childhood developmental and behavioral outcomes such as impaired cognitive development, socio-emotional skills, and poor academic performance.<sup>[19, 20]</sup> Food insecurity during key developmental periods, such as the first 5 years of life, can impact child health by disrupting brain growth and development, harming physical development and negatively influencing parental well-being.<sup>[20]</sup>

SNAP is associated with decreased food insecurity and improved health outcomes among children.<sup>[21, 22]</sup> After receiving SNAP benefits for 6 months food insecurity has been shown to fall by  $\frac{1}{3}$  in children.<sup>[23]</sup> Infants, toddlers and preschoolers were less likely to be hospitalized, underweight or at risk for developmental delays when in families enrolled in SNAP in comparison to those in likely eligible families that did not receive SNAP.<sup>[24]</sup>

Rather than guaranteeing that SNAP can meet the needs of all who become eligible, a block grant to SNAP sets funding at a fixed amount and gives states authority to take actions that may divert funding for the original purpose. During times when demand for SNAP is high, such as a recession or natural disaster, there would be insufficient funds to meet the needs of all experiencing hunger. Funding from the block grant could be diverted to fill other budgetary needs. If SNAP funding is capped in a block grant, benefits could be reduced or families eliminated from the program, as you described, and leave families without the nutrition they need to thrive and can have enduring consequences on child health and development. Participation in SNAP reduces hunger and leads to healthier and more academically successful children.

*Question Submitted by Hon. Salud O. Carbajal, a Representative in Congress from California*

*Question.* Nutrition security is critical at all stages of a child's development. The patchwork of Federal nutrition programs seeks to address childhood malnutrition, yet the prevalence of obesity, a form of malnutrition resulting from food insecurity continues to rise, even during the pandemic.

What are some of the barriers families experience in accessing WIC, SNAP, free and reduced prices lunches to ensure their children have consistent access to balanced nutritious diets?

*Answer.* The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions significantly disrupted daily routines for children, typical modalities for receiving and accessing food, and combined with social and environmental stressors related to the pandemic led to changes in eating behaviors, physical activity, and stress regulation thereby elevating obesity risk.<sup>[5, 6]</sup> Research has demonstrated that access to SNAP during the prenatal period and in childhood is associated with lower rates of obesity and metabolic syndrome in adulthood.<sup>[7]</sup> Improvements in the nutritional content of the WIC package have been associated with improvements in dietary quality and nutrient intake during pregnancy<sup>[8]</sup> and improved distributions of birth weight.<sup>[9]</sup> SNAP participation has been associated with reduced childhood obesity.<sup>[10]</sup>

In the absence of a resilient and secure food system we cannot ensure the nutritional needs of children and families are consistently met. Research has shown that families that had abrupt reductions or elimination of SNAP benefits resulting from increased income experience increased household and child food insecurity.<sup>[11]</sup> SNAP benefits are too low for families to afford a healthy diet.<sup>[12]</sup> Expansions in SNAP and the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program passed in relief packages by Congress helped elevate the benefits to a level nearing USDA estimates for a nutritious diet.

Barriers to SNAP participation include misinformation regarding eligibility criteria and fears regarding repercussions (child removal, penalties, payback obligations), particularly among immigrant households as public charge criteria changed.<sup>[13]</sup> Facilitators of SNAP participation include the treatment of recipients with dignity and autonomy to make purchasing decisions consistent with household needs.<sup>[14]</sup> Further, addressing barriers that farmers experience to accepting SNAP, such as internet access challenges,<sup>[15]</sup> would help increase the availability of healthy food options for SNAP recipients.

*Question Submitted by Hon. Jimmy Panetta, a Representative in Congress from California*

*Question.* SNAP does not currently allow program participants to use their benefits to purchase home-delivered meals that are tailored to health care needs and chronic conditions, which can help so many people stay healthy at home. Given the health benefits of these types of meals, in your view, should the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot Program be expanded to include smaller, independent retail partners, including organizations that provide medically-tailored meals delivered directly to the homes of low-income vulnerable populations, like seniors, nationwide?

*Answer.* The ability to engage organizations that provide medically-tailored meals and independent retail partners that can deliver food to homes would provide a needed health benefit to an underserved population: children and adults with chronic and medically complex health conditions who are recipients of SNAP. The delivery of medically tailored meals to medically and socially complex adults has been associ-



ated with reduced hospital and nursing facility admissions.<sup>[1]</sup> The delivery of medically-tailored meals can also promote family meals which are associated with healthy nutritional outcomes for children and address challenges to meal preparation.<sup>[2]</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the potential value of online purchasing options. State policymakers should evaluate the benefits of online purchasing pilot and other innovative delivery methods. Delivery systems should reduce stigma and maximize participation of diverse retailers that offer high quality of nutritional foods.<sup>[3]</sup> Presently there are a limited number of online retailers available in the *SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot Program*. Next, efforts are needed to ensure equity for online purchasing, including broadband internet access and delivery access. Finally, meaningful engagement of SNAP recipients and research is needed to better understand barriers and motivators for online food shopping.<sup>[4]</sup>

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\* **Editor's note:** entries annotated with † are retained in Committee file.