

July 11, 2023

The Honorable Shontel Brown
449 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Brown:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to express our support for the SNAP Access for Medically Vulnerable Children Act of 2023 (H.R. 706).

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) leaves an indelible impact on approximately 40 million families each month by promoting health and nutrition for low-income households.¹ SNAP supports health outcomes by enabling families to afford nutritious meals while reducing the financial burden that food expenses can cause, allowing families to afford other necessities that promote their health and well-being.

Food insecurity and food insufficiency are correlated with more chronic health issues in children and increased rates of depression in adolescents, just two of a plethora of negative consequences that can result from a lack of proper nutrition.² By providing stable access to nutritious meals for families, SNAP improves food security. Meta-analyses have highlighted the inverse correlation between consuming a healthy, nutritious diet and depression.³ There are also links between nutrition and physical health, making nutrition key in addressing chronic diseases. For example, a healthy diet is a critical component for diabetes prevention and management.⁴ Nutrition during childhood years can also be a crucial factor in the risks of developing early-onset cardiovascular disease.⁵ Childhood nutrition is pivotal in children's health both short and long term, demonstrating the urgency of expanding SNAP access, including to children who are medically vulnerable. Despite the vast

¹ Keith-Jennings, Brynne et al. "Links of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program With Food Insecurity, Poverty, and Health: Evidence and Potential." *American Journal of Public Health*. Vol. 109,12. December 2019.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6836787/>.

² Coleman-Jensen, Alisha et al. "Food Insecurity in Households with Children: Prevalence, Security, and Household Characteristics, 2010-11." *United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Information Bulletin Number 113*. May 2013. https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/43763/37672_eib-113.pdf?v=41424.

³ O'Neil, Adrienne et al. "Relationship between Diet and Mental Health in Children and Adolescents: a Systematic Review." *American Journal of Public Health*. Vol. 104,10. October 2014.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4167107/pdf/AJPH.2014.302110.pdf>.

⁴ "Global Report on Diabetes." *World Health Organization*. 2016.

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/204871/9789241565257_eng.pdf;jsessionid=740BBD3331F70C4F3D82A316E732BDCE?sequence=1.

⁵ Capra, Maria Elena et al. "Nutritional Approach to Prevention and Treatment of Cardiovascular Disease in Childhood." *Nutrients*. Vol. 13,7. July 2021. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8308497/>.

support that SNAP offers to many families, there are still families who lack access to these benefits. H.R. 706's intent to ensure SNAP benefits are accessible to families with medically vulnerable children is critical, as proper nutrition can be of particular importance for children experiencing chronic illnesses. This bill expands access to SNAP to individuals under 18 years of age who have chronic conditions, which include, but are not limited to: mental health conditions, substance use disorder, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and being overweight.⁶

Medically vulnerable children, in part, include children who have one chronic illness and are at risk of developing a second.⁷ Diet undoubtedly impacts one's chances of developing chronic disease.⁸ Proper nutrition can help to manage many chronic illnesses, in addition to reducing the risk of acquiring new chronic conditions. For children who are experiencing chronic illnesses, and may be at risk of developing more, the importance of nutrition can not be understated. SNAP is also correlated with improved preventive health care access and diminished health care costs. Additionally, by reducing the share of income spent on food, families are more readily able to allocate this money towards health care visits, and access to preventive health care can reduce overall health care expenditures. These benefits can be stark, with studies linking SNAP participation with a reduction in health care costs up to \$5,000 per person.⁹

Thank you for recognizing the importance of expanding SNAP benefits to allow more children to have access to quality nutrition. I commend you on your efforts to draft this legislation in support of medically vulnerable children and their families. We look forward to working with you to pass the SNAP Access for Medically Vulnerable Children Act of 2023.

Sincerely



Bruce Lesley
President

⁶ "Social Security Act" Social Security Administration. https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title19/1945.htm.

⁷ "Social Security Act" Social Security Administration. https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title19/1945.htm.

⁸ Tucker, Katherine. "The Role of Diet in Chronic Disease." Present Knowledge in Nutrition. Eleventh Edition. 2020. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780128184608000186>.

⁹ Keith-Jennings, Brynne et al. "Links of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program With Food Insecurity, Poverty, and Health: Evidence and Potential." American Journal of Public Health. Vol. 109,12. December 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6836787/>.