



May 22, 2023

The Honorable Alma Adams  
2436 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand  
478 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative Adams and Senator Gillibrand,

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children’s advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions, we are writing to express our support for the Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2023 (H.R.3037/S.1336).

As the nation’s largest federal food assistance program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the first line of defense against hunger and food insecurity for poor and low income children. More than 14 million children — representing nearly half of the program’s participants — rely on SNAP for consistent, healthy meals.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, SNAP lifted more than 800,000 children out of poverty,<sup>2</sup> and countless studies show that SNAP participation improves food security, health, educational, and long-term economic outcomes for children.<sup>3</sup> The Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2023 takes crucial steps to ensure that children across the country have access to the nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

Currently, SNAP allotments are determined based on the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), which is the lowest of the USDA’s four price estimates for a healthy diet. Unfortunately, the TFP does not accurately reflect the needs of low-income families and largely restricts their diets.<sup>4</sup> First Focus strongly supports the Closing the Meal Gap Act’s directive to use the Low-Cost Food Plan in

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<sup>1</sup> Kronquist, Kathryn. “Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2019.” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. January 2017. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/Characteristics2019.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Creamer, John, Shrider, Emily A., Burns, Kalee, and Chen, Frances. “Poverty in the United States: 2021.” US Census Bureau Current Population Reports. September 2022. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/demo/p60-277.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Furman, Jason, Munoz, Cecilia and Black, Sandra. “Long Term Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.” White House Council of Economic Advisors. December 2015.” [https://obamawhite-house.archives.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/SNAP\\_re-port\\_final\\_nonembargo.pdf](https://obamawhite-house.archives.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/SNAP_re-port_final_nonembargo.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> “Replacing the Thrifty Food Plan in Order to Provide Adequate Allotments for SNAP Beneficiaries.” Food Research and Action Center. December 2021. [https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/thrifty\\_food\\_plan\\_2012.pdf](https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/thrifty_food_plan_2012.pdf).

place of the outdated TFP. Research shows that it more accurately reflects the cost of a diverse and balanced diet and that SNAP recipients who spend more on food increase their dietary quality.<sup>5</sup> This increase is especially important for developing children, as food insecurity is specifically associated with poorer physical and mental health, lower school performance, and diminished psycho-social functioning.

Additionally, this legislation advances equity by allowing residents of Puerto Rico to access the same SNAP benefits as those in the continental United States. Puerto Rico has a child poverty rate of 57% — far higher than any state in the continental U.S.<sup>6</sup> Since their colonization, territories and their inhabitants have experienced deep discrimination that has manifested in unequal access to benefits. The Closing the Meal Gap Act takes a positive step in achieving equity for Puerto Rico’s children.

Finally, we applaud the Closing the Meal Gap Act’s elimination of onerous time limits that create barriers to SNAP enrollment. Unreasonable time limits undermine access to services for low income families and undercut opportunities for their children. These actions often hurt children with the greatest need, creating categories of deservedness of children that negatively impact their well-being and harm their short-term and long-term success. Almost 90% of households with children work in the year before or after receiving SNAP benefits and more than 60% work while receiving SNAP.<sup>7</sup> Time limits create unnecessary bureaucratic barriers and remove already employed or underemployed parents who are unable to document their work. Eliminating these time limits allows children to access the nutrition they need without forcing their parents to navigate burdensome layers of bureaucracy.

We commend you for your work to eliminate arduous barriers that keep food off of children’s tables. We look forward to working with you to make sure that all children have adequate access to SNAP and receive the nutrition they need to thrive.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley  
President

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Balmaceda, Javier. “Tax Credit Expansions Expected to Significantly Reduce Poverty in Puerto Rico.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. March 14, 2022.

<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/tax-credit-expansions-expected-to-significantly-reduce-poverty-in-puerto-rico>

<sup>7</sup> Dean, Stacy, Bolen, Ed, and Keith-Jennings, Brynne. “Making SNAP Work Requirements Harsher Will Not Improve Outcomes for Low-Income People.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. March 2018. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/making-snap-work-requirements-harsher-will-not-improve-outcomes-for-low#:~:text=Impo-sing%20harsher%20work%20rules%20would,greater%20risk%20of%20food%20insecurity>.