



June 9, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Glenn "GT" Thompson  
Chairman  
Committee on Agriculture  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Scott  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

The United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Catholic Charities USA, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition are committed to ending domestic hunger while seeking fair opportunity for returning citizens who have paid their debt to society.

We are strongly urging Congress to eliminate the ban on SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits for people with drug-related felony convictions that prevent ex-offenders from fully reintegrating into society, without advancing public safety.

In 1996, Congress imposed a lifetime ban on individuals convicted of a drug felony from receiving SNAP after only two minutes of floor debate. Although states can opt-out of enforcing this ban, state policymakers must affirmatively do so, and 22 states continue to limit SNAP eligibility for people with felony drug convictions.

The time is ripe for Congress to act. With the current Farm Bill set to expire this year, Senators Warnock and Booker, along with Representative Steve Cohen, have introduced the RESTORE Act, which eliminates this SNAP ban from those who have committed a drug felony. The legislation also codifies a USDA administrative waiver to SNAP state agencies that allows individuals to apply for SNAP 30 days prior to their release from incarceration. This legislation, to be attached to the Farm Bill, strengthens this anti-poverty program.

Why this is important:

- **Access to SNAP critically helps returning individuals avoid hunger that can increase recidivism risk and cost to taxpayers if left unaddressed.** Research suggests that most individuals released from incarceration experience food insecurity. Studies have also found that recently released individuals who receive public assistance like SNAP are less likely to recidivate, while withholding assistance from returning individuals increases recidivism risk.
- **Denying food assistance because of a past conviction has no public safety or crime deterrent value.** Instead, enforcement of the ban only compounds hunger and poverty that can undermine successful reentry to the community.

- **Denial of food assistance is a significant obstacle to remission from addiction, weakens individuals' ability to recover, and may increase risk of overdose and death.** Many people with drug convictions have a history of struggling with substance use disorder. Removing barriers to SNAP, such as the drug felony ban, can help mitigate hunger which can interfere with successful treatment and recovery outcomes. Risk of overdose and death is also high following release from incarceration. Ensuring adequate nutrition along with access to health care during an individual's reentry can help decrease their risk of returning to substance use and of potential overdose.
- **The ban hurts the children and families of people with felony drug convictions.** Families receive a much lower overall benefit when a parent is ineligible for SNAP because of a drug felony conviction and this ban. This means that households with a banned adult have access to less food and support which increases the risk of families with children going hungry.
- **The lifetime SNAP ban prevents returning individuals from benefiting from SNAP E&T programming.** The SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program provides job and vocational training opportunities that can help prevent recidivism and support effective reentry.

Our organizations support strong re-entry programs across the nation. We help provide the necessary tools – food, shelter, housing, education, mentoring, and workforce development programs – for those who have returned home from incarceration to lead a more productive life. If the federal government wants to truly provide a hand up to those in need and remove barriers to employment and further incarceration, eliminating the felony ban on SNAP benefits should enjoy strong bipartisan agreement.

We look forward to continued collaboration with Congress and the Administration in trying to find solutions that would significantly reduce food insecurity and eliminate hunger in our Nation.

Sincerely,



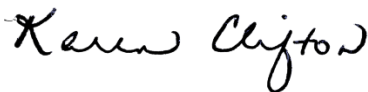
Mr. Ralph Middlecamp  
National President, National  
Council of the United States,  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul



Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD  
President & CEO  
Catholic Charities USA



Most Rev. Borys Gudziak  
Archbishop of Ukrainian  
Archeparchy of Philadelphia  
Chair, Committee on Domestic  
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Karen Clifton  
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