

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3601

February 19, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to thank you for the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recent notice of proposed rulemaking regarding work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), RIN 0584-AE57, and to urge our support for promulgation of the rule as proposed. At a time when our nation is seeing historic economic growth, including generationally-low unemployment rates, this proposed rule will allow our country to continue to thrive by restoring integrity to SNAP and by moving the American people toward complete self-sufficiency, thereby saving American taxpayers billions of dollars.

As you may know, SNAP was originally intended to give hard-working Americans a second chance should they encounter a difficult stretch in life — it was never intended to become one's livelihood, or their so-called "way of life." In spite of this, since our last welfare reform legislation in 1996, the program has repeatedly shifted from these first intentions, and has continually been weakened by increased administrative flexibility.

This flexibility has allowed state governments to abuse their power and evade the reasonable work requirements that SNAP utilizes to ensure that recipients don't take advantage of the current system. These requirements obligate ABAWDs, who are non-disabled and between the ages of 18 and 49, to work or participate in an employment program for at least 20 hours a week to continue to receive benefits for more than three months over a 36-month period.

However, under the current law, state governments may waive these requirements in areas where the unemployment rate is above the national average. Given our nation's strong economy, this can include areas with unemployment rates under five percent — a rate that is conventionally considered as full employment. Additionally, states are allowed to grant partial state waivers by grouping together areas with similar labor markets, which allows a state to gerrymander areas for waiver purposes, thus potentially authorizing waivers for the entire state.

Also, states may exempt up to 15 percent of their ABAWDs. However, should the states not use these exemptions, they are able to hoard them for use in future years, which has resulted in certain states accumulating hundreds of thousands of exemptions. All of this has led to an abdication of SNAP's original purpose and has disincentivized self-sufficiency, which resulted in 3.8 million individual ABAWDs on SNAP in 2016, of which 2.8 million were not working at all.

The USDA's proposed rule would help to fix this significant problem by implementing several common-sense reforms to the current work requirement waiver laws. These include raising the necessary unemployment threshold for local area work requirement waivers to seven percent unemployment, ending the states' ability to gerrymander waiver districts by only granting partial state waivers for areas that are "economically tied," ending the states' ability to accumulate and carryover work requirement exemptions for more than one year, and increasing SNAP administrative efficiency by setting clearer standards for allowable waivers.

These reforms would save hard-working American taxpayers \$15 billion over a ten-year period and would help to re-establish the true goal of the SNAP program, to help hard-working Americans in their attempts to gain self-sufficiency. As such, we support the USDA's proposed rule and urge you to promulgate this rule in its current proposed version, to ensure our nation's continued success.

Thank you,



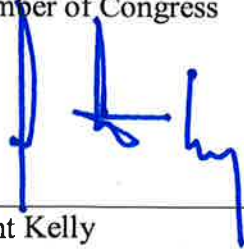
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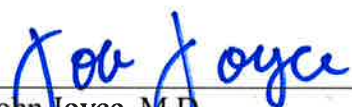
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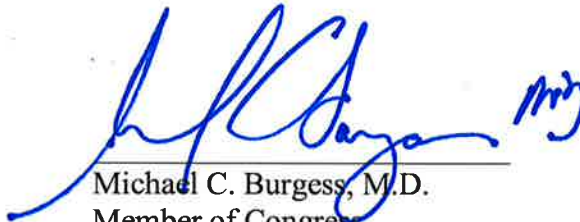
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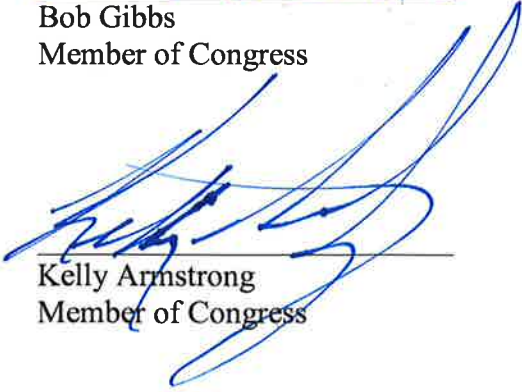
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