

May 3, 2018

Dear Representative:

The undersigned 56 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) and allied organizations are writing to ask that you oppose H.R. 2, the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018. This bill, as written, will have exceptionally negative impacts on the health and wellness of the LGBTQ community, as well as that of all low-income Americans regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

According to the Williams Institute, 27% of LGBTQ adults—2.2 million people--experienced food insecurity in 2014.¹ LGBTQ individuals accounted for 4.7% of all food insecure Americans in 2014 despite only 3.7% of Americans identifying as LGBTQ that year.²

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's primary nutrition assistance program, and it plays a critical role in addressing food insecurity for 44.2 million low-income individuals, including LGBTQ people.³ According to the Williams Institute's analysis of nationally representative data, LGBT adults are 1.6 times more likely to experience food insecurity than non-LGBT adults.⁴ The Williams Institute also found, based on data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), that 27% of all lesbian, gay, and bisexual Americans between the ages of 18 and 44—nearly 1.37 million Americans—participated in SNAP in the year prior to the survey.⁵ According to a nationally representative survey commissioned by the Center for American Progress (CAP) in 2017, more than twice as many respondents who identified as LGBTQ reported using SNAP in the past year (21%), than did non-LGBTQ respondents (9%).⁶ The Williams Institute additionally found that food insecurity and SNAP participation are not distributed evenly in the LGBT community — people of color, women, bisexuals, those with children, the unmarried, and younger adults experienced the highest rates of food insecurity and SNAP participation.⁷ Thus, the bill's proposed changes to SNAP would disproportionately hurt LGBTQ people.

The proposed eligibility and benefit cuts in H.R. 2 would cause one million households with two million individuals to lose access to food assistance altogether or experience a

¹ Taylor N.T. Brown, Adam P. Romero & Gary J. Gates, *Food Insecurity and SNAP Participation in the LGBT Community*, The Williams Institute, (2016), available at <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Food-Insecurity-and-SNAP-Participation-in-the-LGBT-Community.pdf>. Because the report uses the *LGBT* acronym, the same acronym is used, rather than the *LGBTQ* acronym, when discussing the report's findings.

² Gallup, *In U.S., More Adults Identifying as LGBT*, (January 11, 2017), <http://news.gallup.com/poll/201731/lgbt-identification-rises.aspx>.

³ United States Department of Agriculture, *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2016*, (2017), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2016.pdf>.

⁴ *Supra*, note 1.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Caitlin Rooney, *LGBTQ people are more likely to turn to benefits like Medicaid and SNAP*, Center for American Progress, *forthcoming* 2018. Note that the comparison between the percentage of LGBTQ respondents reporting use of SNAP and the percentage of non-LGBTQ respondents reporting use of SNAP is statistically significant.

⁷ *Supra*, note 1.

reduction in benefits.⁸ H.R. 2 would require SNAP beneficiaries ages 18 through 59 who are not living with a disability or raising a child under six to prove once a month that they are working at least twenty hours a week, participating at least twenty hours a week in a work program, or a combination of the two. Those who cannot meet these new requirements would face harsh sanctions. The first failure would mean a loss of benefits for twelve months and each subsequent failure would deny individuals from enrolling for thirty-six months. Individuals would only regain their eligibility by working at least half-time for a month or requalify through an exemption, such as disability.

In addition to threatening food access for LGBTQ Americans, H.R. 2 fails to provide legal protections that would ensure that LGBTQ SNAP participants will have equal access to employment opportunities that can lift them out of poverty.

Employment discrimination is a significant factor that directly contributes to LGBTQ poverty and unemployment rates. Over half of the US population lives in a state without explicit nondiscrimination laws prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.⁹ A survey conducted in 2017 by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that 1 in 5 LGBTQ people experienced discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity when applying for jobs and 22 percent reported experiencing this discrimination in pay or promotions.¹⁰ Sixteen percent of respondents to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey reported losing their job due to their gender identity or expression. Respondents to that survey also reported a 15 percent unemployment rate, which was three times higher than the unemployment rate for the total U.S. population at the time.¹¹

Despite Chairman Conaway's alleged guarantee that all individuals seeking a spot in the newly expanded SNAP education and training programs, the level of investment proposed in H.R. 2 will be severely inadequate to ensure proper education and training for the current SNAP participants who would be subjected to these new requirements and time limits.¹² The bill authorizes \$7.65 billion when \$150 billion would be needed to provide education and training programs for everyone who would be impacted by the new work requirements.¹³

Additionally, narrowing the meaning of caregiving to solely the rearing of children below the age of six when calculating satisfaction of the work requirement would be damaging to the approximately 3.6 million LGBTQ Americans who are engaged in family

⁸ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, *Chairman Conaway's Farm Bill Would Increase Food Insecurity and Hardship* (April 18, 2018), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/chairman-conaways-farm-bill-would-increase-food-insecurity-and-hardship>.

⁹ Movement Advancement Project, *Non-Discrimination Laws*, http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non_discrimination_laws (last modified April 13, 2018).

¹⁰ NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of LGBTQ Americans* (2017), available at <https://www.npr.org/documents/2017/nov/npr-discrimination-lgbtq-final.pdf>.

¹¹ Sandy E. James, *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, National Center for Transgender Equality (2016), available at <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>

¹² Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, *Farm Bill Funding for Work Programs Won't Buy Much* (April 16, 2018), <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/farm-bill-funding-for-work-programs-wont-buy-much>.

¹³ *Supra*, note 8.

caregiving. LGBTQ caregivers already face unique challenges in meeting the needs of chosen and biological family, including increased financial strain, poorer health, and emotional stress.¹⁴

To subject food insecure households with LGBTQ individuals to these new time limits and work requirements with no protections or real assurances of adequate and sufficient employment and training opportunities is particularly cruel, and undermines the goals of SNAP and the entirety of the social safety net. The bill would only ensure that more people will go hungry and turn to the underground economy in order to get their basic needs met.¹⁵ Therefore, we implore you vote no on H.R. 2 when it comes to the House floor in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

AIDS Alabama
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
American Psychological Association
Amida Care
Athlete Ally
Bailey House, Inc.
Bisexual Resource Center
Cascade AIDS Project
Center for Law and Social Policy
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Coalition on Human Needs
Equality Alabama
Equality California
Equality North Carolina
Family Equality Council
FORGE, Inc.
Global Justice Institute
GMHC
Harlem United
HIV Medicine Association
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
Latino Commission on AIDS
Los Angeles LGBT Center
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Mazzoni Center
MomsRising
Moveable Feast Inc.
Movement Advancement Project

¹⁴ Ulrike Boehmer et. al., *Differences in Caregiving Outcomes and Experiences by Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. 5.2. *LGBT Health* 112 (2018).

¹⁵ Meredith Dank et. al., *Surviving the Streets of New York: Experiences of LGBTQ Youth, YMSM, and YWSW Engaged in Survival Sex*, Urban Institute (February 25, 2015), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/surviving-streets-new-york-experiences-lgbtq-youth-ymsm-and-ywsw-engaged-survival-sex>.

Nashville CA
Nashville CARES
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
National Working Positive Coalition
NMAC
Outfront Minnesota
People For the American Way
Positive Women's Network-USA
Pride Action Tank
Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
SOMA Action LGBTQ Committee
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
Transgender Law Center
Treatment Action Group
TruEvolution, Inc.
Twin Cities Quorum
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Whitman-Walker Health
Witness to Mass Incarceration