

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20510

May 1, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leadership,

We write to request that future economic relief and stimulus legislation include additional support for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As Colorado struggles with the COVID-19 pandemic and the economy remains unstable, we need to ensure that low-income families have continued access to healthy food.

SNAP is a vital and proven tool to reduce food insecurity in our communities and help our country's most vulnerable individuals. As COVID-19 spreads and the health and economic consequences continue to grow, more people will turn to SNAP for its stability and support. Even before COVID-19, nearly one in eleven Coloradans struggled with hunger. With more than 65,000 Coloradans applying for unemployment benefits in the past three weeks, this number will only surge. In these times, reducing food insecurity for everyone should be a top priority.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided \$15.8 billion for SNAP to stabilize the program and to account for increased enrollment. While this is an important step, Congress should improve SNAP to better serve households and individuals who depend on this program, both those enrolling for the first time and those already enrolled. As you work on developing future economic relief and stimulus legislation, we request that you consider including the following proposals to help SNAP work better for Colorado:

- Increase overall SNAP benefits by 15 percent: While the CARES Act increased funding for the program, 40 percent of households already receive the maximum benefit and are therefore excluded from the bill's impact. By leaving the benefit threshold in place, these families, often the lowest income households, will not receive the additional assistance this time of crisis requires.

- Increase the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30: Raising this threshold will provide greater food security for individuals and households. Further, as research shows that every dollar the federal government spends on SNAP generates as much as \$1.80 in overall economic activity, the additional funds will act as economic stimulus for local economies.
- Expand Access to Online Purchasing and Improve Online Infrastructure: As demonstrated in the online purchasing pilot program, allowing SNAP benefits to apply to online orders works. As more states express interest and the need to socially distance continues, we request that USDA allow expanded access to this program and establish clear guidance to help streamline implementation at the state and retailer level. Given the sensitive information included on EBT cards, we also request that any online system include sufficient security measures and infrastructure to protect users and prevent fraud and identity theft.
- Suspend agency rulemaking that would limit SNAP access or reduce SNAP benefits. Currently, the United States Department of Agriculture has three regulations pending that would eliminate or reduce benefits for at least 33,000 Coloradans, including 11,000 children and those signing up for the first time because of COVID-19. Amidst a global pandemic and economic instability, implementing these or any related regulations could cause more low-income families to go hungry.

COVID-19 is forcing many Colorado families and households to make difficult decisions and buying food should not be one of them. We look forward to working with you to help Coloradans continue to access food during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

/s/Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress

/s/Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

/s/Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

/s/Jason Crow
Member of Congress