Re: FeedMore WNY Statement on USDA Proposal to Severely Restrict SNAP Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility

FeedMore WNY strongly opposes the Trump administration’s proposal to remove millions of people struggling with hunger from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and hundreds of thousands of children from free school meals through the administration’s proposal to severely restrict Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (Cat El).

In short, the proposed rule would increase the risk of food insecurity for millions of children, seniors and working families while putting additional strains on household budgets – and pressure on hunger-relief organizations. Currently, for each meal provided by the network of Feeding America food banks – of which FeedMore WNY is a member — SNAP provides nine meals. Private charity cannot compensate for the breadth of the impact of cuts being proposed. Harmful proposals like these will stretch the capacity of FeedMore WNY’s member agencies more than they already are and adversely affect our ability to feed every hungry family in our community.

The proposal to severely restrict Cat El would mean hardworking families would face a higher chance of losing SNAP if their income increases. Today, Cat El protects SNAP eligibility for workers as their income rises above the federal income cut-off. This helps ensure SNAP benefits slowly taper off rather than stop abruptly. The goal of the current process is to prevent a situation where a higher paying job or more work hours would result in a lower household budget. By restricting categorical eligibility, people will not only have a disincentive to work, but also will be punished when they try to do the right thing by working more hours, getting better-paying jobs or saving money so unexpected bills don’t push them underwater.

The proposed rule also would leave states less able to cushion the blow for households whose economic circumstances are suddenly weakened by a natural disaster or an economic downturn. As many more of our neighbors turn to FeedMore WNY’s member agencies during hard times, this could have an inordinate impact on our agencies when our network is faced with its largest need. The proposals also would add complexities to an already efficient program and add additional administrative costs, thereby both undermining access to SNAP benefits.

Moreover, restricting Cat El would result in hundreds of thousands of innocent children losing their school meals. We cannot expect our vulnerable children to thrive in school when they are worried about when they will get their next meal. Any policy that results in the loss of school meals for any child who faces hunger is unconscionable.

We urge the Administration to rescind the rule and instead work to increase SNAP participation so more families can worry less about putting food on the table and instead focus on getting back on their feet.

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