May 9, 2018

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senate  
302 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tim Walz  
United States House of Representatives  
2313 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Erik Paulsen  
United States House of Representatives  
127 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Keith Ellison  
United States House of Representatives  
2263 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
United States House of Representatives  
2204 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tina Smith  
United States Senate  
309 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jason Lewis  
United States House of Representatives  
418 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum  
United States House of Representatives  
2256 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Emmer  
United States House of Representatives  
315 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Nolan  
United States House of Representatives  
2366 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the Minnesota Congressional Delegation:

Many provisions in H.R.2, the *Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018*, which passed the House Committee on Agriculture last month, put critical food benefits at risk for many Minnesota seniors, families, and low-wage workers living in poverty. This five-year reauthorization of the farm bill would cut $23 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). For Minnesota’s state-supervised, county-administered SNAP program, this legislation would also enlarge and complicate the bureaucracy for a program that is already very complex to administer. I urge you to oppose this legislation.

In 2017, SNAP benefits contributed $602 million to Minnesota’s economy and helped more than 621,000 Minnesotans to purchase groceries. The help is modest; on average, Minnesota families receive $1.24 per person per meal in SNAP benefits. Roughly 70 percent of SNAP recipients are children, seniors, and people with disabilities.
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This legislation would require adults under age 60 who do not have children, and those with children older than 6 years, to work or participate in employment and training services for at least 20 hours per week in order to receive SNAP benefits. Minnesotans that are able to work should do so, however, making food benefits that address basic needs contingent on work requirements would create an entirely new bureaucracy for Minnesota’s 87 counties. It would also cause many Minnesotans to lose their food assistance. Experience from Minnesota’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, another safety net program with work requirements, demonstrates that employment counselors spend more than half their time on paperwork requirements to document participants’ work hours rather than on actually helping participants find a job or addressing their barriers to work. Moreover, the work requirements in this bill belie the fact that 67 percent of families with children receiving SNAP are already working but earn wages that are so low they still qualify for the program. In the name of “encouraging work,” this bill would create a bureaucracy more focused on paperwork than providing services to vulnerable people living in poverty.

Another provision in the bill that would inflate county bureaucracies and cause thousands of Minnesotans to lose SNAP benefits is the elimination of broad-based categorical eligibility (BBCE). BBCE is a state option that Minnesota has used to reduce paperwork, make the program more accessible to low-income seniors, and to help low-wage workers get through spells of unemployment without losing ground on their efforts to get out of poverty. BBCE allows Minnesota to waive the SNAP asset test which results in far less paperwork for county and tribal eligibility offices. BBCE also allows low-wage workers to hold on to savings and has allowed many more very low-income seniors who have some savings to receive nutrition assistance from SNAP. Prior to the implementation of BBCE, only 28 percent of Minnesota seniors living in poverty qualified for SNAP. Today, almost 60 percent of Minnesota seniors living in poverty receive help from SNAP. SNAP provides seniors with an important support that improves their health and eliminates the need to choose between purchasing food versus needed medications, utilities and other expenses.

Another benefit of BBCE is that it allowed the state to raise the SNAP gross income limit from 130 percent of the federal poverty level (which is $26,556 per year for a family of three) to 165 percent of the federal poverty level (which is $34,696 per year for a family of three). Raising the gross income limit helps low-income households that have high housing, medical, or child care costs who are struggling to make ends meet to receive needed food assistance. Lowering the gross income limit and bringing back the asset limit in SNAP would increase hunger in our state and take us backward.

There are a number of other very concerning provisions in the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 that I would be happy to discuss with you; this letter addresses just some of the biggest cuts to the SNAP program. It is critical that Minnesota maintains the flexibility for state policy options that meet the needs of the people we serve. Furthermore, service delivery should not be made more complicated at a time when we are working to introduce more efficient and effective administration in Minnesota’s public assistance programs. SNAP is the most effective anti-hunger program in the country; cutting the program in the ways put forward in the 2018 farm bill would undoubtedly increase hunger and food insecurity in Minnesota, with both short and long-term ramifications for Minnesota families.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Johnson
Acting Commissioner