

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 7, 2005

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,  
and Forestry  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,  
and Forestry  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Chambliss and Ranking Member Harkin:

As the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee prepares its reconciliation package, we urge the Committee to resist changes to current law that would cut benefits provided through federal nutrition programs.

The Food Stamp Program is the cornerstone of federal nutrition programs, providing an important safety net to the most vulnerable people in our communities. Roughly 88 percent of households receiving food stamp benefits have gross incomes below the poverty line; 38 percent of food stamp households have gross incomes at or below half of the poverty line. Approximately 80 percent of food stamp benefits go to families with children, with the remainder going primarily to households with elderly or disabled persons.

The Food Stamp Program serves as the first line of defense in the national battle against hunger. Food banks, private charities, and local communities are not equipped to replace lost food stamp benefits. Cuts to the program would disproportionately impact the neediest individuals in our society.

Recent studies have shown the Food Stamp Program to be an effective and efficient means to ensure that low-income families have access to nutritious and healthy food. Over the last several years, steady progress has been made to reduce errors and inefficiencies in the program. A recent report by the Government Accountability Office found that the combined error rate of the Food Stamp Program is at the lowest rate in program history.

We understand that the Committee has difficult decisions to make as it works to reduce mandatory spending by \$3 billion. In the wake of hurricane Katrina, more families will be forced to rely on food stamp benefits; therefore, we urge the Committee to keep cuts to federal food assistance programs as close to zero as possible and oppose changes in reconciliation that would jeopardize the integrity of federal nutrition programs.

Sincerely,



Jay Ruppelle  
Arlen Speck

Patty Murray  
A. Kennedy

Frank R. Lautenberg

Nike DeBenedictis

E. L. Chafe

John Chafe  
Chris Hatch

Barbara

Jack Reed  
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