

The
Food Policy

Working Group

April 7, 2005

Dear Members of Congress:

The Food Policy Working Group, a coalition of religious and other anti-hunger advocacy organizations concerned with ending hunger in the United States, is writing to **express our deep concern about the recently adopted House and Senate Budget Resolutions' anticipated profound negative impact on the Food Stamp Program and other anti-hunger efforts across the nation.**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there are 12,583,000 families in the United States who are hungry or threatened by hunger (official annual estimates). This represents 11% of all families, and includes families with children, senior citizens, and people working at low-wage jobs who have difficulty making their paychecks stretch to buy enough food.

Many of our communities have been working in partnership with the Bush Administration to support their efforts to expand participation among families and individuals who are eligible for the nutrition programs. Even though the services of local houses of worship and emergency feeding programs help many in a time of crisis, the fastest most reliable way to reduce hunger is through the national nutrition programs. In FY 2004, the Food Stamp Program brought \$24,559,000,000 in federal funds into our local communities where low-income people could purchase their own food at local supermarkets, grocery stores, and farmer's markets. Similarly, the Child Nutrition Programs such as school lunch, school breakfast, after school meals, and summer food brought \$11,207,000,000 to communities across our land.

Whether through the budget process or through the reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, we are **opposed to the creation of a food stamp block grant or a broad new waiver authority for the Food Stamp Program.** We believe that such policy changes would hinder our ability to reach more of the eligible children and households in need, and undermine these programs' ability to respond to increased need as economic conditions deteriorate.

Cuts in these entitlement programs would make outcomes worse for all in need as well as for the providers and communities who do not have the resources to step into the vacuum. Hunger is a problem of the whole human community, not just those who feel moved to give out of charitable concern. Hunger is a national issue. Neither state or local

governments nor charities have the capacity to replace the resources the federal government has provided to support these programs if those funds are reduced. Families should not have to choose between food and shelter, or food and health care. **Since the Earned Income Tax Credit, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) also provide critical support to the families our communities serve, they should not be cut or weakened.**

It is simply unconscionable to choose to reduce the deficit by cutting *efficient and effective* programs that reduce hunger and suffering particularly when these programs had nothing to do with the creation of the deficit.

We therefore urge you to 1) oppose budget cuts to the Food Stamp Program and other national nutrition programs; 2) protect the Food Stamp and other nutrition programs by insisting that budget conferees and Congressional leaders set the Agriculture Committee instruction at the smallest possible number, but no more than the Senate's \$2.814 billion over five years; 3) oppose any TANF reauthorization bill provisions that would include an optional block grant or new waiver authority.

Sincerely,

American Baptist Churches USA
America's Second Harvest, The Nation's Food Bank Network
Bread for the World
Call to Renewal
Catholic Charities USA
Congressional Hunger Center
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Food Research and Action Center
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
National Student Campaign Against Hunger & Homelessness
National WIC Association
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office
RESULTS
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
Volunteers of America

For further information contact Kay Bengston, Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs, ELCA and chair of the Food Policy Working Group. Phone: 202-626-7942; E-mail: kay.bengston@elca.org

