



October 15, 2019

Education and Labor Committee
Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association and the 50 million students they serve, we thank you for holding a hearing on “Examining the USDA’s Proposed Cuts to Free School Meals.” NEA members are teachers and education support professionals, including school food-service employees, in 14,000 communities across the nation.

School employees know that when students go hungry, they cannot focus on learning. The USDA’s proposed revision of categorical eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program would hurt students who rely on free- and reduced-price school meals. The NEA’s concerns are:

- Revising categorical eligibility in SNAP, according to USDA’s own estimates, would deny food assistance to 3.1 million individuals—mostly families with children, older people, and people with disabilities.
- An estimated 500,000 children who are automatically eligible for free school meals because they live in SNAP households could be denied those meals, potentially undermining their health and physical development and reducing their capacity for learning and engagement in school.
- Under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), high-poverty schools and school districts can offer free meals to all students, and receive federal reimbursement, if at least 40 percent of the students are categorically eligible for free- or reduced-price school meals. Losing access to free school meals not only affects the individual children who rely on them; it has the potential to jeopardize the free- and reduced-price meal program for entire schools and/or school districts.

The USDA is attempting to accomplish through rulemaking what Congress rejected in 2018, when Members approved a Farm Bill that did cut SNAP benefits because of the harm those cuts would have done to families. NEA strongly opposes revising categorical eligibility because it would diminish our nation’s ability to achieve a top priority for us all: providing a healthy foundation for our children. Once again, thank you for this opportunity to submit our comments.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association