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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Reform
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association who teach and support students in schools and on college campuses in 14,000 communities, we applaud you for holding the upcoming hearing, “A Threat to America’s Children: The Trump Administration’s Proposed Changes to Broad Based Categorical Eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.” The hearing highlights the administration’s work to take steps that will negatively affect our most vulnerable children. Moreover, we appreciate this opportunity to provide comments for the record.

When students go hungry, they cannot focus on learning. The proposed revision of categorical eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, according to USDA estimates, could deny food assistance to 3.1 million individuals, and jeopardize free school meals for **nearly 1 million children** who are now automatically eligible for them because they live in SNAP households. Nearly half a million children could move from receiving free meals to receiving reduced-price meals, an additional burden on already-stressed families; 40,000 children could lose eligibility for free and reduced-price meals altogether. Please consider:

- Food insecurity can lead to less educational attainment in children and negatively affect social, emotional, and cognitive development. While SNAP does not cover all of low-income families’ food bills, free school meals help to fill the gap;
- Direct certification saves schools time on enrollment paperwork, eliminates the possibility of paperwork errors that could incorrectly keep students from receiving free school meals, and brings into the program students whose families are eligible for food assistance but have not applied for aid; and
- The 2015 Centers for Disease Control’s National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and other studies link healthy dietary behaviors with higher grades and improved behavior, comprehension, and attendance.

All students, regardless of family income, deserve the support to learn. Their chances for success should not be limited by the lack of nourishment required for healthy development. NEA strongly opposes the USDA proposal to revise categorical eligibility in the SNAP program.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association