

February 18, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We urge you to use your authority to implement the new Farm Bill regulations for the 'Heat and Eat' program this fall when states receive their Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) block grants. This will allow state agencies time to develop policies to address the change and gives states maximum flexibility to comply with their new LIHEAP allotment. Our states need time to adjust their policies to accommodate this drastic cut and roll out the changes seamlessly to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants.

The Farm Bill conference agreement, which was signed into law last week, increases the cost to states that use LIHEAP payments to qualify low-income participants for SNAP. Currently, the District of Columbia and 14 states (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin) implement LIHEAP policies. This state option has helped to alleviate some of the untenable 'heat or eat' choices that households face. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that this change will reduce benefits for about 850,000 low-income households in our states by an average of \$90 a month. However, we have heard from our hunger advocates that the impact to certain states will be far greater.

We urge you to implement the 'Heat and Eat' policy change this fall when states receive their LIHEAP block grants so that our agencies have adequate time to comply with their new LIHEAP allotments. Furthermore, this will allow the Heat and Eat states the necessary time to provide outreach and support for many seniors, children, and individuals living with a disability who will be impacted by this policy change.

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