



March 13, 2018

The Honorable Brett Guthrie, Chairman
Higher Education and Workforce Development
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Davis, Ranking Member
Higher Education and Workforce Development
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
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Dear Members of the House Education and the Workforce Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned religious denominations and faith-based organizations representing millions of people of faith across the country, we write to express our deepest concern about proposals to undermine Americans' basic living standards by imposing work requirements on essential anti-poverty programs. These programs, including Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and housing vouchers, already assist millions of Americans on the path to self-sufficiency. Onerous requirements would only create barriers for America's most vulnerable people to receiving medical treatment, eating nutritious meals, and living in safe homes.

While our religious traditions and practices vary enormously, we are united by our fundamental belief in the dignity of every human being. When people face financial or health challenges, our communities are on the front lines. We feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, counsel those struggling with addiction, and care for the sick. But the faith community cannot work alone to solve these challenges; Medicaid, SNAP, and housing programs are indispensable in complementing our efforts.

Working, engaging in one's community, and pursuing education should all be encouraged. Houses of worship and faith-based organizations promote these practices every day. However, we believe that increasing affordable job training, instituting paid family leave, making child care more affordable, improving addiction treatment services, and subsidizing transportation are far more likely to yield the desired outcomes than imposing unnecessary barriers to critical programs. "Community engagement" should never be used as a threat to cut programs that are the difference between health and sickness, hunger and sustenance, and shelter and homelessness for millions of people.

The programs that have been targeted for potential work requirements, including Medicaid, SNAP, and housing vouchers, serve populations that are largely already working or would be exempt from requirements because of their age or disability status. Others face obstacles to working, like caring for sick relatives, suffering from illnesses that do not qualify them for disability benefits, attending school, or seeking addiction treatment. Furthermore, the history of TANF demonstrates that creating bureaucratic hurdles for enrollment in federal programs will result in coverage loss, even for those who qualify. Pulling

the rug out from people already in challenging circumstances will not make it easier for anyone to work, participate in their community, or seek education.

Our faiths demand that we do all we can to amplify the voices of those concerned about losing medical care, food assistance, and housing benefits. We call on Congress to reject harmful proposals that will make the lives of millions more difficult.

Sincerely,

American Muslim Health Professionals

Bread for the World

Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Islamic Relief USA

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

National Council of Jewish Women

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

People of Faith for Access to Medicines

Poligon Education Fund

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Episcopal Church

The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

“Bread for the World has always said that the best way to reduce hunger and poverty is with a good-paying job. In work, men and women find purpose, self-worth, and even connection with God. However, there is little evidence that work requirements lead to the kinds of jobs that lift people out of hunger and poverty. In fact, most participants in SNAP and other programs are either children, elderly, people with disabilities, or are already working. Lawmakers should focus on the root causes of unemployment and under-employment, and support policies that improve job opportunities for people who are struggling.”
Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World

“As Quakers, we believe that there is that of God in everyone. Every individual should be able to live a life of dignity regardless of income, ability, ethnicity, religion or work status. We all have experienced how work can give meaning to our lives, but success in work requires that the most basic human needs are met. Food, housing, and healthcare are essential in every person’s life. Often people who rely on government assistance to meet these basic needs have barriers that prevent successful work. Depriving people of human survival support in order to promote work will not foster a culture of work.

While the best pathway out of poverty is a job, our current economy doesn’t assure that a job alone provides economic stability. For working families unable to make ends meet, access to government assistance to put food on the table, a roof over their heads, and provide a better future for their children is human decency and the hallmark of a country that cares about people. Taking away or limiting nutrition assistance, health care, or housing assistance makes it harder, not easier, to get and hold a job. We must strive to make this country a place where everyone can fulfill their true potential. That requires smart and sustained investments in education, training, transportation, and childcare while addressing other barriers to employment.” **Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation**

“The GOP leadership’s focus on more restrictive work requirements for safety net programs is seriously out-of-touch with the reality of poverty in the 21st Century. 21st Century Poverty statistics demonstrate that more than 65% of the household utilizing safety net programs have at least one worker in full-time employment. Current Republican proposals do not acknowledge this fact, nor the fact that these programs have become a business subsidy, allowing employers to pay starvation wages.

GOP leadership and the Administration have prioritized a tax giveaway to the wealthiest in our nation while proposing unprecedented budget cuts to domestic human needs programs. It is clear that Republicans are waging a new war on poverty, one that directly targets people in poverty (even those who are working!) as the adversary. This is the wrong way forward and must be stopped.” **Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice**

“As a national organization focused on ending hunger, we are gravely concerned about the increasing emphasis on work requirements,” said **Abby J. Leibman, president and CEO of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger.**

“Many of these proposals do nothing to actually get people back to work; rather, they would simply prevent millions of Americans struggling to get by—including veterans, people in rural communities and young adults who have aged out of the foster care system—from accessing critical government benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Imposing harsher time limits and additional arbitrary requirements on SNAP recipients will do

nothing but stop people from putting food on the table each day. In Jewish tradition—and across all faith traditions—there is a fundamental value of taking care of the most vulnerable among us. In that light, we should be doing more to strengthen—not weaken—programs such as SNAP that provide vital support to those in need.”

*“When the Good Samaritan saw a person in need on the side of the road, he gave the person comfort, care and housing. He did not shake down the person in need or require anything in return. The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd call on Congress to be both a good steward of our country's budget, but also to be a Good Samaritan. End this new needless work requirement.” **Lawrence Couch, Director of The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd***