Dear Speaker Pelosi,

On behalf of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, I am writing to thank you for your exceptional leadership and unwavering efforts to address growing food insecurity needs around the country. We are so grateful for your commitment to prioritizing benefit increases for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the next COVID-19 response legislation.

As you know, nearly 40 million Americans struggle to put food on the table on a regular basis, and COVID-19 is already exacerbating their hardship, as well as adding to the number of people at risk of food insecurity. Boosting the maximum SNAP benefits by 15% is not only essential, it is urgent — without it, we will see countless Americans thrown into dire circumstances and needlessly suffer from hunger. Increasing the minimum SNAP benefit from $16 to $30 will particularly help seniors who face unique barriers to nutrition assistance. Furthermore, suspending all administrative SNAP rule changes is critical — certainly for the duration of the pandemic, and indefinitely during this time of economic distress and long-term recovery.

We also respectfully request you to prioritize our proposal to exclude Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) as counted income for determining military families’ eligibility for SNAP. This will ensure that junior enlisted service members are able to provide the basic needs for their families, eliminate unnecessary stress and anxiety, and contribute to optimal mission readiness. We know that even before COVID-19, tens of thousands of military families were facing food insecurity and turning in desperation to food pantries that operate on or near every military installation in the country. COVID-19 is now adding to the hardships that these military families face, including higher rates of unemployment and underemployment for military spouses (even above the previous 24% unemployment rate for military spouses), more limited availability of affordable childcare options, and school closures that may intensify difficulties for the numerous children from military families that receive free or reduced-price school meals.
In addition to military families, we remain deeply concerned about long-overlooked populations that face specific barriers to food security — including veterans, Native Americans, college students, seniors and LGBT seniors in particular, and people in rural and remote communities. COVID-19 has exposed the gaping holes in our country’s nutrition safety net, as it becomes evident why programs like SNAP are essential to ensuring that millions of vulnerable individuals and families can meet their most basic human needs. As you are well aware, the charitable sector cannot meet the daily needs of millions of Americans who struggle with food insecurity, now more than ever. Charitable organizations will continue to play a vital role in addressing hunger and poverty, but the overwhelming majority of food assistance has historically come from — and must continue to come from — federal assistance.

Jewish tradition is based on the understanding that each person is made in the divine image of God and that we are all responsible for one another, particularly in the darkest times. Thank you for your continued commitment to these Jewish and American ideals. We are grateful for your partnership in ensuring that no matter a person’s circumstance, they will not go hungry as a result of this crisis.

Sincerely,

Abby J. Leibman
President & CEO

CC:

The Honorable Steny Hoyer, House Majority Leader
The Honorable Jim Clyburn, House Majority Whip
The Honorable Collin Peterson, Chair, House Committee on Agriculture
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Adam Smith, Chair, House Committee on Armed Services
The Honorable Marcia L. Fudge, Chair, House Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations
The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Jackie Speier, Chair, House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Military Personnel