



March 12, 2020

Dear Members of the House of Representatives:

On behalf of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, **we ask that you support the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201)**, recently introduced by Representatives Nita Lowey, Robert Scott, Richard Neal, Sanford Bishop, Rosa DeLauro, Frank Pallone, and Collin Peterson.

An effective response to COVID-19 requires a strong safety net for our most vulnerable populations. The food security funding and nutrition waivers in this bill will stimulate the economy, provide vital resources for high-risk groups, and mitigate the spread of the virus.

Food security protections are particularly important during the COVID-19 outbreak because social distancing presents unique threats to low-income families and the economy. As employment hours are cut and sick workers without paid time off are forced to remain home, more working families are requiring food assistance; as schools close, low-income children are losing access to free school meals; and calls for self-quarantine measures may not be possible for families who lack resources to stockpile foods and other supplies.

Furthermore, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides an important economic stimulus. SNAP benefits are spent quickly and provide an immediate boost to local economies. For every \$1 spent on SNAP during a weak economy, \$1.70 is generated in economic activity. **The nutrition provisions in this bill will help ensure economic stability and prevent families from having to choose between protecting themselves and loved ones from the outbreak and putting food on the table.**

H.R. 6201 will:

- Allow the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to approve state plans for emergency SNAP assistance to households with children who lose free or reduced-price school meals because schools are closed for at least 5 consecutive days;
- Give the USDA Secretary the authority to issue nationwide SNAP waivers in states that could result in increased benefits during the COVID-19 emergency;
- Provide \$100 million for U.S. territories including Puerto Rico to receive additional nutrition assistance to respond to the COVID-19 emergency;
- Increase funds for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) (providing \$500 million in H.R. 6201 to extend access to pregnant women or mothers with young children who lose their jobs due to the COVID-19 outbreak). With increased concern of exposure to COVID-19, steps should be taken to permit remote certification of participants, retain current participants, and ensure adequate access to WIC foods in the case of quarantine or distribution challenges;
- Increase emergency food (TEFAP) (\$400 million in H.R. 6201 for commodity assistance program; additional \$250 million for home-delivered and congregate meals provided to

older people and people with disabilities and caregivers for homebound seniors; expected to provide about 25 million additional meals);

- Suspend work/training requirements for SNAP during the COVID-19 emergency;
- Adapt Disaster SNAP and disaster provisions of other federal nutrition programs to provide nutrition resources for low-income consumers who lack resources to stockpile food and to make up for disrupted school meals service;
- Expand access to Summer Food Program, including to those whose families do not currently receive SNAP benefits; and
- Increase SNAP benefit amounts to bolster the program's countercyclical impacts.

We urge Congress to quickly pass this bill. Nutrition assistance is vital to protecting those most vulnerable to this pandemic, our economy, and preventing further spread of the disease.

Sincerely,

Margo Wootan,  
Vice President for Nutrition  
Center for Science in the Public Interest