Dear Speaker Ryan, Lead Pelosi, Chairman Price, and Ranking Member Van Hollen,

As the Budget Committee works towards a federal budget, we write to urge you to preserve the integrity of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and not block grant one of the most powerful tools we have for ending childhood hunger in the United States today. We are greatly concerned that block granting this vital safety-net program will be robbing a program of its greatest strength: its ability to expand in times of economic or natural disaster, and then retract when conditions improve.

For more than four decades, SNAP has been a fundamental bulwark for the poorest and hungriest people in our nation. Deemed “a government reform that worked” by the National Journal, SNAP serves as the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. In fact, SNAP is such a success, that in 2014 the program helped lift 4.7 million Americans out of poverty, including 2.1 million children. Additionally, when compared to other government programs, SNAP is far more effective than any other program in lifting families out of deep poverty. SNAP is also successful at reaching key vulnerable populations. Three-fourths of SNAP households are families with children, seniors, or people with disabilities. And because SNAP benefits are so urgently needed by families, they are spent quickly—97 percent of benefits are redeemed by the end of the month of issuance.

By design, SNAP is able to react quickly and robustly to economic problems. When a regional, state, or area economy is in trouble, the program is among the most effective government responses and is able to reach those who need it most. This has been seen most clearly and dramatically since the start of the recession in 2008, when millions of people became
newly unemployed or underemployed. SNAP responded during this time to provide desperately needed help, and put food on the table for millions of American families. We also saw the same responsiveness in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Thousands of families sought safety and shelter in neighboring cities, and SNAP benefits were able to expand rapidly to meet the increased need in Gulf Coast states.

The SNAP program also has a strong work incentive. For every additional dollar a SNAP recipient earns, their benefits decline by only 24 to 36 cents — much less than in most other programs. Families that receive SNAP thus have a strong incentive to work longer hours or to search for better-paying employment. Furthermore, according to the Congressional Budget Office, the number of SNAP participants is expected to decline by over 11 million people over the next ten years, reducing budget outlays for the SNAP program by $800 million. This is the beauty of the SNAP program in its current form; it increases support to the food insecure during times of economic hardship, and scales back spending as the economy grows and people return to work.

There has been much talk about changing the SNAP structure and turning the funds over to governors and state legislators as a block grant. For the 45 million Americans relying on the SNAP program, we urge you to reject this proposal. Shifting this program to a block grant, and limiting states to a set amount of funding, means that states would be faced with impossible choices as need increased: Do they cut benefits, or do they place children and seniors on waiting lists for food assistance? Doing so would roll back a generation of progress against very deep hunger, and destroy a bipartisan compact that has developed and sustained a strong and effective national nutrition safety net.

We firmly agree with the President, who said, “Food stamp recipients did not cause the financial crisis; recklessness on Wall Street did.” Instead of attacking the SNAP program, the House budget should focus on economic growth and job creation, including strengthening the SNAP program so that participants are better positioned to take advantage of education and work opportunities as the economy improves.

If SNAP is block granted, many millions of seniors, people with disabilities, children, struggling parents – working and unemployed – and others will suffer. Our country will also see more hunger and poverty, worse health and educational outcomes, and higher health costs. The nation as a whole will be weaker – morally, economically, and fiscally. Please stand with us in ensuring that the federal budget would not harm low-income households, increase hunger, and dilute SNAP’s strengths.
Sincerely,

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, PhD.
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress

Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress

Filemon Vela
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Katherine Clark
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Marcia L. Fudge
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Juan Vargas
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Elijah E. Cummings
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Henry "Hank" C. Johnson, Jr.
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Susan Davis
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Jerrold Nadler
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José E. Serrano
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Jared Huffman
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Albio Sires  
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Marcy Kaptur  
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Ewen Graham  
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Bennie G. Thompson  
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Alcee L. Hastings  
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Brenda L. Lawrence
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Chaka Fattah
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Lucille Roybal-Allard
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Steve Cohen
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Danny K. Davis
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Debbie Dingell
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Grace Napolitano
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Zoe Lofgren
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Bobby L. Rush
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Corrine Brown
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Tim Ryan
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Nita Lowey
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Jim Costa
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C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
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Marc Veasey
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Sanford D. Bishop Jr.
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