The Closing the Meal Gap Act

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Right now, more than 34 million Americans are struggling with food insecurity – including an estimated 5 million children, over 2 million Americans are receiving unemployment benefits, and millions of Americans cannot afford rent and fear eviction. In the richest nation in the world, that's unacceptable. That is why permanently strengthening the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is more important than ever.

The rising cost of food in America outpaces SNAP benefits each year, forcing families to choose between placing food on the table and covering other important expenses. Despite the program's success, SNAP benefits provide a mere $2.03 per meal and, due to this inadequacy, roughly half of all households participating in SNAP are still food insecure. Benefit levels for SNAP are based on the Thrifty Food Plan, a restrictive model used to calculate food costs that does not meet the needs of today's low wage workers and their families. The 2021 USDA Household Food Security report showed that the typical U.S. household spent 15 percent more on food than Thrifty Food Plan estimates.

The Closing the Meal Gap Act would help to address these issues by raising the baseline benefit for all SNAP households and allocating more funds to those with large medical and housing expenses.

The Closing the Meal Gap Act will:

- **Increase benefits by about 30 percent** by incorporating the Low-Cost Food Plan into the SNAP formula, to better take into account how much working people spend on food,
- **Eliminate eligibility limits & unrealistic barriers by:**
    - **Permanently authorizing the standard medical deduction in every state** for seniors and disabled individuals applying for SNAP benefits at a minimum of $140. Individuals with high expenses could continue to apply for a higher, itemized medical deduction.
    - **Eliminating the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction** in the SNAP formula to take into account the cost of living for SNAP recipients in areas with high rent and utilities.
    - **Eliminating Time-Limits on Benefits** for Americans struggling to find work.
- **Expand benefits for Puerto Rico**, ending discrimination against those who live and work in Puerto Rico by transitioning them to SNAP and treating them as if they were states.