March 17, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Majority Leader  Speaker
United States Senate  United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader  Minority Leader
United States Senate  United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As a rapidly increasing number of American families are falling victim to the health and economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis, we the undersigned are asking that all measures be taken to ensure that our most financially vulnerable families can quickly and easily enroll in and maintain benefits from public assistance programs. To that end, we encourage you to incorporate the ASSET Act (S. 3276/H.R. 5848) into emergency relief legislation being considered. This bill would greatly reduce barriers associated with enrolling in public assistance by removing asset limits for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The bill will also raise current limits for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. Without doing so, any attempts Congress makes to boost the economy through direct cash payments to families runs the risk of unintentionally disqualifying families from receiving support or removing families from much-needed public benefits programs.

Research from the Urban Institute shows that eliminating asset limits in SNAP reduces “churn” by 26 percent without lengthening the overall duration of SNAP participation.

We know that as this crisis threatens to persist in the weeks and months ahead, food and financial insecurity will become an increasing challenge for low-income families. These families – particularly those whose primary earners are employed in the service industry and other hourly occupations that have been halted – will be increasingly unable to cover...
the cost of food and other household expenses. We know Congress has already acted to provide some relief for current and potential SNAP recipients through the provisions of Section 301 of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201). We now ask that you take the next step to increasing families’ access to these assistance programs by eliminating unnecessary administrative hurdles such as asset tests. Doing so will support families’ ability to continue to pay for food and basic expenses without putting their health at risk.

As this crisis continues, utility payments will begin to strain families’ finances as well. To avoid alienating these families from energy resources, we strongly encourage Congress to eliminate the federal provision that allows states to impose their own asset tests on LIHEAP applicants and recipients, despite there being no such test at the federal level.

Any effort that can be made to protect families from economic ruin in a time of crisis—particularly the 37 percent of American households already living just one lost paycheck away from financial ruin—must be made now in an effort to keep our communities and our economy stable. Now is not the time to force families into further economic uncertainty. We respectfully ask that Congress does all it can to cut the red tape on SNAP, LIHEAP, TANF and SSI by including the ASSET Act in emergency coronavirus-related legislation.

Sincerely,

David Newville
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Organization Signers
AAA Fair Credit Foundation
Accounting Aid Society
The Arc of the United States
Autism Society of America
Boston Tax Help Coalition
Casa of Oregon
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Center for Law and Social Policy
Chinese American Planning Council
Commonwealth
Equality NC
Fahe
The Financial Clinic
First Focus Campaign for Children
Hawai‘i Alliance for Community-Based Economic Development
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Leap Fund
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
MomsRising
National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders
National Community Action Partnership
National Diaper Bank Network
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Women's Law Center
North Dakota Economic Security and Prosperity Alliance
PathWays PA
RAISE Texas
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Roberts Family Development Center
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United Way of Washtenaw County

Urban League Twin Cities

Virginia Community Action Partnership