

August 30, 2024

Majority Leader Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Majority Speaker Mike Johnson
U.S. Capitol Room H154
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
Russell Senate Office Building, 317
Washington, DC 20510

Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries
Rayburn House Office Building, 2433
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, Leader Johnson, and Leader Jeffries,

The SPLC Action Fund writes to urge you to reject the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024, proposed by Rep. Glenn Thompson, and any Farm Bill that would drastically defund nutrition programs. The proposed restrictions to the Thrifty Food Plan benefits adjustments, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates will reduce future food assistance by nearly \$30 billion in cuts over 10 years, would be devastating to everyday Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants who rely on these benefits to meet their cultural, dietary, and health needs.¹

For more than 50 years, the Southern Poverty Law Center has been a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements, and advance the human rights of all people. We focus on five states in the Deep South: Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida. Our core impact issues include eradicating poverty, decriminalizing and decarcerating Black and Brown people, protecting voting rights and civic engagement, and dismantling white nationalism and extremism. We aim to eradicate poverty specifically by tearing down discriminatory systems that perpetuate poverty and eliminating racial and economic inequality in all facets of life -- including access to food and water, healthy and affordable housing, high-quality health care, free and equitable education, safe working conditions, fair wages, and government support to meet basic needs. Ensuring access to critical nutrition programs like SNAP are implemented effectively in our Deep South states is among one of the top priorities for our organization.

1) Food Insecurity in the South

As a result of systemic inequity, our Deep South states have some of the highest rates of poverty, as well as a high need for housing, health care, and nutrition support. In recent years, the food insecurity rate was the highest in the South,² and the burden of food insecurity fell

¹ Katie Bergh and Lauren Hall, "Chair Thompson's Plan Would Cut SNAP Benefits and Ignore Scientific Evidence in Thrifty Food Plan Updates, CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES, Apr. 18, 2024, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/chair-thompsons-plan-would-cut-snap-benefits-and-ignore-scientific>

² Data & Statistics on Hunger, FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CENTER, <https://frac.org/hunger-poverty-america#data>.

disproportionately on Black children. Together, roughly 1.8 million children under the age of 18 were living in poverty in our Deep South states in 2022, and approximately 800,000 of those were Black children.³ In 2022, 1 in 3 Black children went without reliable access to food.⁴

In April 2024, 12.3% of Alabamian, 13.1% of Floridian, 13.4% of Georgian, 13.6% Louisianan, and 10.5% of Mississippian adults reported there was either sometimes or often not enough to eat in the last 7 days.⁵ Approximately 15.4% of Alabamians, 12.9% of Floridians, 14.8% of Georgians, 19.5% of Louisianians, and 13.8% of Mississippians participate in SNAP.⁶ In Alabama, an estimated 240,000 children under the age of 18 were living in poverty in 2022, with 39% being Black children. In Florida, an estimated 723,000 children under the age of 18 were living in poverty in 2022, with 29% of those being Black children. In Georgia, an estimated 411,000 children under the age of 18 were living in poverty in 2022, with 25% of those being Black children.⁷ In Louisiana, an estimated 257,000 children under the age of 18 were living in poverty in 2022, with 40% of those being Black children. In Mississippi, an estimated 175,000 children under the age of 18 were living in poverty in 2022, with 40% of those being Black children.

2) The House Farm Bill

The Farm Bill presents an opportunity for Congress to make progress against food insecurity and hunger. Research finds that food insecurity can lead to a decrease in mental and physical health outcomes, standardized testing scores, and overall classroom readiness for the upcoming academic year.⁸ More than 40 million people participate in SNAP each month.⁹ SNAP is one of the most effective anti-poverty programs that is known to improve health outcomes, local economies and farmers, and overall nutrition and well-being.¹⁰ Chair Thompson's proposed freeze to the Thrifty Food Plan would impact not only SNAP but other nutritional programs like Puerto Rico's Nutrition Assistance Program, the Emergency Food Assistance Program, and the

³ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Children in Poverty by Age Group and Race and Ethnicity in the United States*, <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/8447-children-in-poverty-by-age-group-and-race-and-ethnicity?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/2,11-12,20,26/false/1095/6640,4087,3654,3301,2664|122/17079,17080>.

⁴ Matthew Rabbitt et al., *Statistical Supplement to Household Food Security in the United States in 2022*, Report No. AP-119, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Oct. 2023, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/107710/ap-119.pdf?v=1282.9>.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Food Scarcity, <https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/?measures=FOODSCARCE> (Accessed May 28, 2024).

⁶ U.S. News SNAP Participation by State, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/food-stamp-benefits-by-state> (Accessed May 28, 2024).

⁷ Kids Count Data Center, *Children in Poverty by Age Group and Race and Ethnicity in the United States*, <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/8447-children-in-poverty-by-age-group-and-race-and-ethnicity?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/2,11-12,20,26/false/1095/6640,4087,3654,3301,2664|122/17079,17080> (Accessed May 28, 2024).

⁸ See, i.e. No Kid Hungry, *How Does Hunger Affect Learning*, April 24, 2023, <https://www.nokidhungry.org/blog/how-does-hunger-affect-learning>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Ty Jones Cox, *SNAP Is and Remains Our Most Effective Tool to Combat Hunger*, CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES, Feb 14, 2023, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/snap-is-and-remains-our-most-effective-tool-to-combat-hunger>.

Summer EBT program.¹¹ The cost of the Thrifty Food Plan must remain in alignment with the foods that real people buy and the time they realistically have to shop for and prepare them. The cuts to SNAP and other nutrition programs in the proposed House Farm bill will be devastating to the long-term health and well-being of low-income Americans.

While the House Farm Bill contains some provisions that remove barriers to access to nutrition programs, such as the RESTORE Act, which would repeal the federal ban on SNAP benefits for felony drug convictions would allow thousands of residents across the Deep South access to critical nutritional support and make them eligible for employment, training, and related supportive services under the SNAP Employment & Training program.¹² Inclusion of these provisions should not be done at the expense of changes in the Thrifty Food Plan which would weaken SNAP and other nutrition programs and leave more families food insecure.

3) Develop a Farm Bill that Protects and Strengthens SNAP

While we believe that the 118th Congress can complete a new farm bill this year, the next farm bill must address the needs of the modern food and farm system, support vital nutrition programs, and invest in farmers and ranchers. We urge Congress to reject any Farm Bill that would take food from hungry, needy families and instead advance a bold and equitable Farm Bill that strengthens and reduces barriers to SNAP and other nutrition programs. SNAP provides critical assistance to those at risk of going hungry and responds effectively during times of heightened need. Our federal government must do more to strengthen this and other vital nutrition assistance programs to fully meet the needs of those facing hunger in this country — not undermine, de-fund, or weaken them.

For any questions, please contact Theresa Lau, Senior Policy Counsel, Eradicating Poverty, at Theresa.lau@splcenter.org. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Theresa Lau
Senior Policy Counsel, Eradicating Poverty
Southern Poverty Law Center

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Georgia, Alabama, and Florida still retain a partial ban, which limits the lifetime ban to certain classes of drug felonies, imposes time-restricted bans, or requires enrollment in a drug education or treatment program. In Florida, a study released in 2018 revealed that the state's ban on SNAP benefits for individuals convicted of drug-related felonies led to increased recidivism for those individuals, and their new offenses were primarily financially motivated. Zaid Jilani, Banning drug offenders from food stamps ended up backfiring, new study finds *The Intercept*, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/06/01/food-stamps-drug-conviction-snap-welfare/>.