

JAMES P. McGOVERN  
SECOND DISTRICT, MASSACHUSETTS

CHAIRMAN  
COMMITTEE ON RULES

SENIOR DEMOCRATIC WHIP



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

408 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-2102  
(202) 225-6101

12 EAST WORCESTER STREET, SUITE 1  
WORCESTER, MA 01604  
(508) 831-7356

94 PLEASANT STREET  
NORTHAMPTON, MA 01060  
(413) 341-8700

24 CHURCH STREET, ROOM 27  
LEOMINSTER, MA 01453  
(978) 466-3552

December 7, 2020

President-elect Joseph R. Biden  
C/o Senator Ted Kaufman  
Transition Leader

Dear President-elect Biden,

As you prepare to lead the country in our efforts to end the pandemic and rebuild our economy, I urge you to prioritize our national response to hunger. With an unprecedented fifteen percent of Americans – 50 million people in total – struggling with food insecurity, there has never been a more pressing time to strengthen our country's social safety net.

I have long maintained that hunger is a political condition, and the choices our leaders make have a profound and direct impact on whether or not Americans families will live in fear of not knowing where their next meal will come from. Ending hunger is not only a moral obligation; there is also a tremendous cost to our country for our indifference. Students who are hungry do not learn. Workers who are hungry are less productive. Senior citizens who are hungry have poorer outcomes and frequently require costly emergency room visits. As you make your Cabinet picks, I believe it is critically important that our next Secretary of Agriculture be someone who has a demonstrated understanding of our anti-hunger programs and who is committed to thinking holistically about ending hunger.

Programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are proven and effective tools for addressing food insecurity, and your new Administration will have significant authority to address this crisis head-on by expanding its reach. As a member of the House Agriculture Nutrition Oversight and Department Operations Subcommittee and as co-chair of the House Hunger Caucus, I urge you to prioritize the following actions:

**Halt the implementation of harmful rules proposed by the Trump Administration that would drastically curtail SNAP eligibility.** The current Administration has sought to make changes to SNAP that will: (1) severely limit broad-based categorical eligibility and effectively throw hundreds of thousands of children off of school meal participation; (2) strip states of their much-needed flexibility to set their own Standard Utility Allowance using state-based and current energy cost information; (3) deny Green Cards to immigrants who utilize SNAP or other safety-net programs; and (4) eliminate state flexibility to waive certain work requirements and exemptions for SNAP participants who are able-bodied adults without dependents. These rules are in various stages of finalization and litigation, and I urge the incoming Administration to immediately rescind or reverse each of them.

**Strengthen nutrition assistance by increasing the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent and increasing the monthly minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30.** The average SNAP benefit is approximately \$1.40 per person per meal, and almost half of all SNAP families use up their entire benefit at the beginning of the month. At the height of the Great Recession in 2009, the passage of the American

Recovery and Reinvestment Act helped prevent large increases in poverty by increasing the maximum SNAP benefit by 13.6 percent, totaling to \$1.74 per person per meal. We must now make a similar, cost-effective investment. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that a 15 percent increase could help upwards of 16 million people, including 7 million children. To that same effect, increasing the monthly minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30 will go a long way in helping individuals and families keep food on the table.

**Enhance access to nutrition assistance during the public health emergency.** As more families across the nation continue to feel the pain of the pandemic and the economic hardship it has wrought, we must expand the reach of nutrition assistance. The incoming Administration should continue to afford states critical flexibilities that have allowed them to establish Pandemic-EBT while also expanding the eligible uses of SNAP benefits. This should include expanding eligibility to include hot and prepared foods, as well as making online SNAP available to a wide range of smaller vendors. The incoming Administration should also partner with restaurants and nonprofits to provide food for vulnerable populations.

**Appoint a hunger czar to implement a national strategy to end hunger.** As you know, hunger is a complex issue that touches upon issues of nutrition, education, racial and economic inequality, healthcare, and agriculture. While we have enough food to feed every American, hunger persists in large part because we lack a coherent national strategy to break down the silos that too often lead to food insecurity. Appointing a high-level official in your Administration to oversee and coordinate a national anti-hunger strategy – for the first time in our nation’s history, no less – would be a turning point in the fight against hunger and signal your Administration’s firm commitment to an issue that millions of American families deal with every single day.

**Convene a Conference on Food, Nutrition and Hunger.** The first and *only* White House Conference on Food and Nutrition was held in December 1969 by President Nixon. It’s past time that the White House convened a holistic discussion of ending hunger once and for all. Food insecurity and health are directly correlated, and even long after the pandemic ends, the country will continue to face structural issues that link hunger to the rising costs of food and health care, increased diet-related illness rates and poor nutrition. With the participation of the President, a White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Hunger would focus on both hunger – emphasizing food accessibility, and nutrition – the nutritional quality of food – with the ultimate goal of ending hunger in America while improving the availability of nutritious food for all Americans. The conference would bring together experts in food, health, nutrition, and economic security to develop a plan to end hunger once and for all in the United States while integrating health outcomes. It should include representatives from every federal department, representatives from states and localities, non-profits and anti-hunger organizations, and for-profit businesses. Most importantly, it should also include current and past SNAP participants. During the Obama Administration, I introduced legislation to convene such a conference and I plan to do the same next year.

I look forward to working with you as a partner in the fight against hunger, and as you craft your action plan for ending food insecurity once and for all, I eagerly offer you my assistance. I wish you success during this critical moment in our history. The thoughts of so many Americans are with you as prepare for the long road ahead.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress