

March 4, 2024

Senator Debbie Stabenow
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and Forestry Committee
731 Hart Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510-2204

Senator John Boozman
Ranking Member, Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry Committee
555 Hart Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510-0404

Representative Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman, Agriculture Committee
2466 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Representative David Scott
Ranking Member, Agriculture Committee
468 Cannon Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Boozman and Ranking Member Scott,

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations composed of current and retired police officers, judges, prosecutors, and other law enforcement professionals, urge you to include the RESTORE Act ([S. 1753/ H.R. 3479](#)) in the Farm Bill. This legislation repeals the lifetime ban imposed on individuals convicted of a drug felony from receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. **As members of law enforcement, we recognize the full repeal of the SNAP drug felony ban as an evidence-based and pro-family method to reduce recidivism and save tax-payer dollars.**

In 1996, Congress imposed a lifetime ban on individuals convicted of a drug felony from receiving SNAP benefits. Although Congress allowed states to opt out of the ban, many states still bar individuals entirely or impose onerous and costly requirements that create barriers to restoring eligibility.

Denying food assistance because of a past drug conviction has no public safety or crime deterrent value. Rather, **evidence indicates that the federal SNAP drug felony ban increases recidivism, resulting in higher rates of re-arrest for those with felony drug convictions.**¹ A 2023 study examining the ban's impact found that, at any given time, it increased a person's risk of arrest by 3.2% for up to five years post-conviction.² **Not**

¹ Yang, C. S. (2017). Does Public Assistance Reduce Recidivism? *American Economic Review*, 107(5), 551-555; Tuttle, C. (2019). Snapping Back: Food Stamp Bans and Criminal Recidivism. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 11(2), 301-327; Sugie, N. F. & Newark, C.J. (2023). Welfare drug bans and criminal legal cycling. *American Journal of Sociology*, 129(1), 41-75.

² Sugie, N. F. & Newark, C. J. (2023). Welfare drug bans and criminal legal cycling. *American Journal of Sociology*, 129(1), 41-75.

only were those blocked from accessing SNAP more likely to be re-arrested, but they were also re-arrested faster than those not disqualified.³

Most people arrested for drug convictions also struggle with substance use disorder.⁴ The SNAP drug felony ban denies support to these vulnerable individuals and obstructs the public health goal of remission and recovery from addiction. Removing the SNAP drug felony ban will help people gain the stability they need in order to complete addiction treatment and maintain recovery. This is because **food security during an individual's reentry creates better, more stable conditions, which decrease their risk of returning to use, being reincarcerated for possession or use, and of potential overdose.**⁵

Reducing recidivism means more people are successfully re-entering society after release from prison. It also means saving money for law enforcement agencies and tax-payers. It costs the government, and families of justice-involved people, at least \$182 billion each year to incarcerate 2.3 million Americans.⁶ Considering that a single person's annual SNAP benefits only total \$3,372⁷ and that access to SNAP reduces arrest rates, **repealing the SNAP drug felony ban will save money by preventing unnecessary spending at a fraction of the cost.** For perspective, providing an individual with SNAP benefits costs 40% less than prison healthcare alone.⁸ Repealing the SNAP drug felony ban gives people the resources to improve their lives and avoid incarceration. In doing so, it proactively preserves the time and money of law enforcement agencies, allowing them to focus on more serious crimes.

Not only does SNAP play a pivotal role in addressing food insecurity and preventing recidivism, but more SNAP dollars means more food is purchased from local grocery stores, benefiting farmers and producers. Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows that **every \$1 invested in SNAP benefits generates**

³ Sugie, N. F. & Newark, C. J. (2023). Welfare drug bans and criminal legal cycling. *American Journal of Sociology*, 129(1), 41-75.

⁴ NIDA. 2020, June 1. Criminal Justice DrugFacts. Retrieved from <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/criminal-justice> on 2023, August 3

⁵ Crutchfield, R.D., & Pitchford, S.R. (1997). Work and Crime: The Effects of Labor Stratification. *Social Forces*, 76, 93-118; Binswanger, I. A., Stern, M. F., Deyo, R. A., Heagerty, P. J., Cheadle, A., Elmore, J. G., & Koepsell, T. D. (2007). Release from prison--a high risk of death for former inmates. *The New England journal of medicine*, 356(2), 157-165. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMsa064115>

⁶ Rabuy, P. W. and B. (2017). Following the money of mass incarceration. Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html>

⁷ USDA. (2021, October 1). Snap special rules for the elderly or disabled. Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/eligibility/elderly-disabled-special-rules>

⁸ Rabuy, P. W. and B. (2017). Following the money of mass incarceration. Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html>

approximately \$1.50 in economic activity, including for rural areas.⁹ This return on investment suggests that repealing the SNAP drug felony ban will also support the economies of local communities.

Repealing the SNAP drug felony ban will also help participants re-enter society by connecting them with the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program.¹⁰ The SNAP E&T program provides adult education, high school equivalency classes, postsecondary education, and vocational training to people eligible for SNAP assistance. Additionally, it helps cover the costs of child care, transportation, and other expenses that assist job training, like tools and uniforms.¹¹ However, people who are ineligible for SNAP cannot receive SNAP E&T. These critical supports help recipients gain work-related skills to provide for their families.¹² **Gaining the necessary skills to secure and maintain a reliable job through programs like SNAP E&T ameliorates significant employment barriers, reduces recidivism, and significantly decreases correctional costs.**

This is partly why increasing SNAP accessibility will uplift families and create safer environments for their children. Two-thirds of SNAP recipients are in families with children, and research shows that **increased SNAP accessibility significantly reduces the rate of cases filed with child protective services.**¹³ SNAP benefits also strengthen families by creating more nurturing home environments which lessen stress and anxiety for children. However, when one of the individuals in a household has a felony drug conviction, a family of four only receives benefits allotted for three people.¹⁴ This reduction in aid impacts everyone in the home, including children, veterans, and elderly people. Low-income households must adjust their meals to account for the reduced amount of food, and convicted family members are barred from job training and childcare. To compound the problem, if the person with a felony drug conviction contributes to the household income, their family will receive reduced SNAP benefits.¹⁵ These conditions create unnecessary food insecurity and stress, leading to preventable health issues for adults and children. These conditions also increase the likelihood of

⁹ The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2022). Policy basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

¹⁰ Thompson, D., & Burnside, A. (2023, April 19). No more double punishments: Lifting the ban on snap and tanf for people with prior felony drug convictions. The Center for Law and Social Policy.

<https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/no-more-double-punishments/>

¹¹ Lower-Basch, E. (2014). Snap E&T. Center for Law and Social Policy.

<https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SNAP-ET-Overview.pdf>

¹² Thompson, D., & Burnside, A. (2023, April 19). No more double punishments: Lifting the ban on snap and tanf for people with prior felony drug convictions. The Center for Law and Social Policy.

<https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/no-more-double-punishments/>

¹³ Austin, A. E., Shanahan, M. E., Frank, M., et al. (2023). Association of State Expansion of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Eligibility With Rates of Child Protective Services–Investigated Reports. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 177(3), 294-302. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.5348

¹⁴ 21 U.S.C. § 862a(b)

¹⁵ Eadler, L. K. (2011). Purging the Drug Conviction Ban on Food Stamps in California. *The Scholar*, 14(1). Retrieved from <https://commons.stmarytx.edu/thescholar/vol14/iss1/4>

individuals returning to substance use or committing crimes of necessity to alleviate hunger and address their family's basic needs. **As such, repealing the SNAP drug felony ban is pro-family and would make sure families have what they need in order to be successful.**

Considering that 91% of individuals suffer from food insecurity upon release from prison,¹⁶ the harms of this ban cannot be overstated. It denies aid to those who disproportionately need it, most of whom struggle with substance use disorder and are at high risk of being rearrested and incarcerated. The RESTORE Act provides a clear path forward in reversing a policy that unnecessarily sets people up for failure when re-entering their communities. **Repealing the SNAP drug felony ban will reduce recidivism, increase public safety, preserve law enforcement resources, support families, and cut government spending. As current and former members of law enforcement, we ask that House and Senate Agriculture Committee Leadership include the RESTORE Act in the Farm Bill to ensure this harmful policy ends.**

Sincerely,

Individuals

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Denver, Colorado

Commonwealth's Attorney Bryan Porter
Alexandria, Virginia

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¹⁶ Wang, E. A., Zhu, G. A., Evans, L., Carroll-Scott, A., Desai, R., & Fiellin, L. E. (2013). A pilot study examining food insecurity and HIV risk behaviors among individuals recently released from prison. *AIDS education and prevention : official publication of the International Society for AIDS Education*, 25(2), 112–123.
<https://doi.org/10.1521/aeap.2013.25.2.112>

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Northern District of Georgia

U.S. Attorney Tom Dillard (Fmr.)
Eastern District of Tennessee and Northern District of Florida

U.S. Attorney Zachary Carter (Fmr.)
Eastern District of New York

Judge Gordon McAllister (Ret.)
District Court of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Judge Leonard Frieling (Fmr.)
City of Lafayette, Colorado

Judge James P. Gray (Ret.)
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Organizations

Blacks in Law Enforcement of America
Law Enforcement Action Partnership

Law Enforcement Leaders
National Association of Black Law Enforcement Officers
The Black Police Experience