

March 29, 2011

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader Pelosi, and Minority Leader McConnell:

In the coming days, as Congress works to negotiate a long-term FY 2011 Continuing Resolution, we urge you to protect the safety net programs that are vital to sustaining the welfare of our nation's more than 13 million low-income seniors. Many of these seniors are representative of what the bipartisan Deficit Commission called "our nation's most truly disadvantaged," those for whom they made it a guiding principle to ensure a "robust, affordable, fair, and sustainable safety net." In keeping with that principle, while we recognize that Congress must make tough choices this year to address the budget deficit, we urge you not to balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable seniors by cutting the programs on which they rely.

One of the key safety net programs for low-income seniors that we are concerned with protecting is the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). Administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, CSFP is a critical program that leverages government buying power to provide nutritionally balanced food packages to more than 600,000 low-income people each month. More than 96% of those benefiting from this program are seniors with incomes of less than 130% of the federal poverty line (approximately \$14,000 for a senior living alone.) For many of these seniors, CSFP may be the only nutrition assistance program readily accessible to them.

CSFP is an efficient and effective program. While the cost to USDA to provide this package of food is, on average, \$20 per month, the average retail value of the foods in the package is \$50. For the seniors participating in this program, CSFP provides more than just food and nourishment, it also helps to combat the poor health conditions often found in seniors who are experiencing food insecurity and at risk of hunger. According to analysis of data from the 1999-2002 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, seniors over the age of 60 who are experiencing some form of food insecurity are significantly more likely to have lower intakes of major vitamins, significantly more likely to be in poor or fair health, and more likely to have limitations in activities of daily living. CSFP food packages, specifically designed to supplement needed sources of nutrients typically lacking in participants' diets like protein, iron, zinc, and vitamins B-6 and B-12, can play an important role in combatting these ill effects of senior hunger.

Unfortunately, despite the clear benefits of CSFP to low-income seniors and the long waiting lists that many states have of seniors who need this program, H.R. 1 targeted CSFP for deep cuts. While this program will require a funding level of \$171.4 million in FY2011 in order to sustain the current caseload, H.R. 1 proposed cutting funding for this program by \$20 million. As a result, if a cut of this magnitude were to be enacted, more than 81,000 low-income seniors would immediately be dropped from this vital program. Although the \$20 monthly CSFP food package may not seem like much, to a low-income senior, it can mean the difference between three square meals a day and not having enough to eat. Especially when you consider that the CSFP food package has a retail value 2 ½ times what it costs the government to provide, it is hard to believe that Congress would cut a program that is both desperately needed and a highly efficient use of federal dollars.

We therefore respectfully urge you to maintain full funding levels for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program in any long-term FY2011 Continuing Resolution. CSFP is both a highly efficient use of federal dollars and critically important to hundreds of thousands of low-income seniors. While we understand the challenges you face in crafting an FY2011 spending bill that addresses our growing federal deficit, our nation must protect critical safety net programs that serve our most vulnerable seniors.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

American Dietetic Association	National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities
Feeding America	National Commodity Supplemental Food Program Association
Food Research and Action Center	National Council on Aging
LeadingAge	National WIC Association
Lutheran Services in America	OWL – The Voice of Midlife and Older Women
Meals on Wheels Association of America	Service Employees International Union
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging	
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs	