

July XX, 2022

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Scott
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge that you make as a priority for inclusion within the next Farm Bill reauthorization package the full repeal of the **[lifetime ban](#) on individuals with a past felony drug conviction from receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**.

In 1996, Congress imposed a lifetime ban on individuals convicted of a drug felony from receiving SNAP and/or TANF. Although Congress gave states the ability to opt-out as part of the 1996 ban, [many states](#) still bar individuals and impose onerous and costly requirements that create barriers to restoring eligibility. The drug felony bans on SNAP and TANF imposed by Congress undermine efforts by individuals striving to transition successfully into their communities and to provide for their families.

SNAP and TANF assistance provide minimal, supplemental support during times of financial hardship and food insecurity. Economic and food security supports are as critical now as ever, as historically high inflation and supply chain disruptions have substantially impacted the cost of food and other basic needs. Individuals and families who qualify for SNAP and TANF are low income, generally living below 200% of the federal poverty line. SNAP provides monthly benefits to help buy food, and to access to work-based learning, vocational services, and support services via SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T). States receive federal TANF block grant funds to provide assistance in [various forms](#), including income assistance (such as wage supplements for working-poor families), childcare, education and job training, transportation, aid to children at risk of abuse and neglect and a variety of other services. This assistance is essential for reducing recidivism rates and rebuilding communities and families.

After twenty-five years, we believe it is time for Congress to end this punitive policy that withholds essential assistance from individuals for the rest of their lives. Restoring access to

SNAP and TANF assistance is an essential step to help provide basic support, such as food, to individuals and [families with children](#). Families receive a much lower overall benefit when a parent is ineligible for SNAP/TANF as a result of a drug felony conviction. This means that families with an adult who is banned from benefits have access to less food and support, resulting in food insecurity and increased stress that can lead to preventable health problems for both adults and children. Food insecurity is pervasive among people transitioning from the criminal legal system. One study found that [91 percent](#) of individuals suffer from food insecurity upon release. A second study concluded that more than [70 percent](#) of those on probation experienced food insecurity.

Formerly incarcerated people are confronted with many legal barriers and other disqualifications as a result of a criminal conviction making this population far more likely to experience unemployment because of a criminal record. Recently released Bureau of Justice Statistics [data](#) indicates that jobless rates among formerly incarcerated people have not improved as the economy has begun to recover. Some [research](#) also suggests that restoring full eligibility for SNAP alone may significantly reduce the risk of recidivism for newly released people with drug felony convictions. One [study](#) estimated that individuals still subjected to the drug felony ban in Florida are about nine percentage points more likely to return to prison after release than individuals with prior drug convictions who have access to SNAP under Florida's partial opt-out of the federal ban. People convicted of a drug felony are also often in need of essential supports such as SNAP and TANF assistance as they seek substance use disorder treatment and strive to achieve recovery. Preventing people convicted of a drug felony from accessing vital SNAP and TANF assistance makes pathways to recovery and prosperity much harder to secure.

Policing and drug law enforcement activity is typically concentrated in low-income communities of color, resulting in higher drug-related conviction and incarceration rates for Black and Brown people, as well as the disproportionate impact of policies such as the lifetime ban on SNAP and TANF assistance on people of color. African American adults are almost [5 times](#) more likely to be incarcerated than whites in state prisons. Latinos are 1.3 times [more likely](#). Women are also [more likely](#) to be incarcerated for drug crimes - 25 percent of women and only 14 percent of men in state prison have been convicted of a drug offense. Women also [comprise](#) the vast majority of recipients for SNAP and TANF, which means we are punishing mothers who have already served their time by imposing this lifetime ban on critical food and other basic forms of assistance.

Lifting the drug felony ban and reinstating SNAP and TANF for those with past drug convictions would immediately remove this barrier that exacerbates hunger and poverty for low-income individuals and families. Lifting the SNAP/TANF ban would also enable individuals to focus on securing employment, housing and other essentials rather than locating food and other basic needs for themselves and dependents.

As organizations working to solve hunger and poverty, and advance both justice reform and supports for individuals transitioning from the criminal legal system, **we urge you to prioritize lifting the ban on SNAP and TANF for those with prior drug convictions by including legislation such as the [Making Essentials Affordable and Lawful \(MEAL\) Act in the next Farm Bill reauthorization](#)**. Please contact Grant Smith, Deputy Director of the Office of

National Affairs with Drug Policy Alliance, at gsmith@drugpolicy.org, or José Santos Woss, Director for Justice Reform with Friends Committee on National Legislation, at Jose@fcnل.org, for questions about this letter or to discuss this request.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of the issues outlined above.

Sincerely,

*= Denotes a national organization.