April XX 2021

Mr. Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We, undersigned organizations, write to urge you to prioritize in the American Jobs Plan repealing the lifetime ban on individuals with a past felony drug conviction from receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and/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 assistance. The drug felony ban on SNAP and TANF imposed by Congress undermines efforts by individuals striving to transition successfully into the community and provide for their families.

SNAP and TANF assistance provide a minimal, supplemental amount of support during times of financial hardship, including now during the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn. Individuals and families who qualify for SNAP and TANF are low income, generally living below 200% the poverty line. SNAP provides monthly benefits to help buy food. States receive federal TANF block grant funds to provide assistance in various forms, including income assistance (such as wage supplements for working-poor families), child care, education and job training, transportation, aid to children at risk of abuse and neglect, and a variety of other services.

During this time of national crisis, individuals who would otherwise be eligible for SNAP and TANF assistance are ineligible due to a cruel and unjust law. And so, they must rely on community-based supports made scarcer by tremendous demand and severely compromised by the pandemic and economic downturn. While the current emergency is punishing these people unjustly, this law has always disproportionately impacted people of color and women. African American adults are 5.9 times more likely to be incarcerated than whites. Hispanics are 3.1 times more likely. Women are 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 with a life sentence.

Restoring access to these programs is an essential step to help provide basic support, such as food, to individuals and families with children hit hard by COVID-19 and the economic downturn. 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 has 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. Lifting the ban and reinstating SNAP/TANF for those with past drug convictions would immediately remove this barrier that exacerbates hunger and poverty for low-income individuals and families.

Access to programs such as SNAP and TANF also provides crucial support for formerly incarcerated individuals as they transition back into society. Even in ordinary times, formerly incarcerated individuals are confronted with too many legal barriers and other disqualifications as a result of a criminal conviction and are far more likely to experience unemployment because of a criminal record. During this time of crisis, employment opportunities and pathways to prosperity or at least out of poverty for formerly incarcerated people are much harder to secure. In addition, the ability of community-based providers to assist people transitioning to society with basic needs has been compromised by high demand for services and the pandemic. **Lifting the drug felony ban in the next reconciliation bill would enable people transitioning to the community to focus on securing employment and housing rather than having to focus on finding basic needs such as their next meal.** One study found that 91 percent of individuals suffer from food insecurity upon release. In addition, recently released individuals incarcerated for a drug offense are 10 percent less likely to recidivate when provided full access to benefits such as SNAP and TANF. When people can secure food, then this will prevent malnutrition which will decrease health care costs and help people continue to progress.

As organizations working to advance justice reform, civil and human rights, reentry supports, and solve hunger and poverty, **we urge you to prioritize lifting the ban on SNAP and TANF for those with prior drug convictions as a part of the American Jobs Plan.** Thank you for considering.

Sincerely,