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October 23, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Secretary Perdue:

This letter is regarding my strong opposition to the USDA's Proposed Rulemaking, "Revision of Categorical Eligibility in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)," RIN 0584-AE62. The proposed changes to eligibility limit access to food assistance programs for vulnerable populations across the country and make it more difficult for veterans and low-income individuals to qualify for necessary assistance through SNAP. This proposal puts the well-being of millions of Americans at risk and I strongly urge the USDA to withdraw this proposal.

Under current law, states have the option to eliminate asset tests and use a higher income threshold when determining SNAP eligibility. It is critical that state officials have the flexibility to design food assistance programs that best address food insecurity in their state. Categorical Eligibility is a highly effective and popular option to provide states with this flexibility by ensuring that low-income families remain eligible for SNAP.

The Governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer, has proposed an expansion of food assistance programming in our state, including changing the asset limit to allow up to \$15,000 in assets for those attempting to access these critical programs. The USDA's proposal directly threatens Michigan's ability to address these issues, should it be implemented. Under the proposed changes, an estimated 3 million Americans would lose access to federal food assistance, including 150,000 in my state of Michigan.¹ In 2017, an estimated 20,113 residents of Washtenaw County, Michigan in my district were hungry but unable to qualify for federal food assistance programs and this new plan would make it more difficult for individuals to receive necessary aid. This proposal threatens millions of hard-working men, women and their families, and places their financial security in jeopardy.

The impact of the USDA's proposal also directly threatens veterans and children. Nearly a million children in the United States would lose direct eligibility for free school meals, more than twice the original estimates by the Department on the proposal's release. These students could

lose their free school meals entirely, or their families are burdened with significant additional bureaucratic hurdles to continue receiving assistance. Families with disabled veterans are nearly twice as likely to be food insecure than households that do not have a member with a disability.ⁱⁱ These changes risk putting our most vulnerable in harm's way.

Congress expressed direct support of Categorical Eligibility in the 2018 bipartisan Farm Bill. It is deeply concerning that the USDA would act contrary to the will of Congress, and work to diminish states' efforts to accurately address the needs of their citizens.

These proposed changes threaten the health and security of millions of Americans, including many children and veterans. We should be working to support vulnerable communities across the nation, not further their economic distress. The American people deserve better.

Sincerely,



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

ⁱ Moran, Darcie. "42% Of Washtenaw County's Hungry Didn't Qualify for Federal Help." *MLive*, 22 Oct. 2019, <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2019/10/42-of-washtenaw-countys-hungry-didnt-qualify-for-federal-help.html>.

ⁱⁱ "SNAP Helps Almost 1.4 Million Low-Income Veterans, Including Thousands in Every State." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. November 8, 2018. <http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance-snap-helps-almost-15-million-low-income-veterans-including-thousands-in>.