

Chairman Black, Ranking Member Yarmuth, and Members of the Budget Committee – thank you for allowing me to testify before you today.

Madam Chair, I'm here today to advocate for federal programs that help our most vulnerable constituents, and to ensure they are remembered as this Committee works to craft a Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Resolution.

Our budget is a moral document. We shouldn't just tell people what we value – we should show them. In the richest country in the world, I find it unconscionable that children all across our country will go to bed hungry tonight – that Veterans will return home from duty and wonder where their next meal is coming from – that seniors will have to decide between their next dose of medicine or their next dinner.

In 2015, 42.2 million Americans lived in food-insecure households, including more than 13 million children and more than 5 million seniors. Madam Chair, we will end hunger in the United States someday. We have the power and the resources. What we lack right now is the political will.

Hunger is a political condition. And – for whatever reason – it hasn't been a priority of Congress.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, is our nation's best chance to alleviate hunger across our country – in both urban and rural areas. In fact, food insecurity rates among rural households are generally higher than urban households. About two-thirds of those who receive SNAP are children, seniors or the disabled. Of those who can work, the majority do, especially among families with children. And the SNAP benefit is already meager at \$1.40 per person, per meal.

During the 114th Congress, the House Agriculture Committee undertook a thorough review of SNAP. As Ranking Member of the Nutrition Subcommittee, I participated in each of the 18 hearings we held.

Over 30 hours, the committee heard from 60 experts and learned that SNAP as it is currently structured is a vital tool for helping to alleviate hunger in our communities.

We learned from experts – conservative and liberal – that SNAP benefits should not be cut, and that current benefits are inadequate. We learned that SNAP does not discourage work, and that case management and job training programs can be successful in helping to move people out of poverty, but those efforts require a well-funded, multi-year commitment.

The bottom line, Madam Chair, is we learned that SNAP works. What we did not hear from our experts, Madam Chair – as some have suggested – is a need to completely overhaul SNAP.

In particular, efforts to convert SNAP into a block grant would be catastrophic. Quite simply – block granting SNAP would wreck our hunger safety net. It would likely result in billions of dollars in cuts, and would force states to reduce benefits or kick hungry people out of the program because of a hard cap on funding.

The fact is, Madam Chair, that block grants are simply budget cuts in disguise. Kicking our vulnerable seniors and children off of SNAP won't get people out of poverty, and it certainly won't help them find well-paying jobs. In fact, Madam Chair, all it will really do is make them hungrier!

I'd also like to highlight that the most recent projections from the Congressional Budget Office estimate the 2014 Farm Bill will save about **\$104 billion** over 10 years, with **over \$92 billion** in projected savings coming from SNAP.

These savings have been achieved as enrollment in SNAP continues to decline from its post-recession peak. Let me caution the Committee, however, that some of the caseload decline is attributable to the return of the three-month time limit in 20 states for non-disabled childless adults who are working less than 20 hours a week. This time limit has resulted in over a million people losing SNAP benefits in 2016 alone – not because they're not hungry, but because of arbitrary time limits.

Lastly, Madam Chair, I would like to talk about national security. I have grave concerns about President Trump's proposal to increase defense spending by \$54 Billion dollars by slashing non-defense discretionary funding. That cut – an 11 percent reduction in funding – will likely hit our social safety net programs hardest.

Our definition of national security needs to mean more than just the nuclear weapons in our arsenal – it should also mean that all of our neighbors have enough to eat.

In closing, my message to this Committee is the same as it was last year and it is simple – do not balance our budget on the backs of America's poor and struggling working families.

SNAP is a program that works as intended, Madam Chair. We shouldn't change its entitlement structure, we shouldn't cut it, and we shouldn't make it more difficult for our constituents to access food assistance when they need it.

If we want to strengthen the program, we should consider ways to increase SNAP benefits through an update to its formula. Recent research confirms that just a \$30 increase in monthly SNAP benefits for households leads to healthier eating and lower rates of food insecurity. That, I think we can agree, Madam Chair, is a worthy goal.

Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.