

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 8, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write seeking information about the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) plans to address the current government shutdown's negative impact on food and nutrition assistance for millions of working Americans and their families.

Our nation's largest and most effective anti-hunger safety net, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), will be severely impacted by a continued lapse in government funding. Currently, SNAP serves more than 38 million of our most vulnerable people, including millions of children, low-income military veterans, and seniors.

Under USDA's present interpretation of the authorizing statute, SNAP must receive an annual appropriation from Congress in order to meet the needs of the program's recipients. Such funding for SNAP benefits has not been allocated beyond the end of this month. Because of this, a continuation of the government shutdown would cripple the program and prevent millions of people from accessing basic food assistance.

While Congress provided \$3 billion worth of reserve funding for SNAP in the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018*, estimations based on program participation suggest this amount would fail to provide all recipients with full benefits even for the month of February. In this scenario, where federal funds are unable to cover full benefit costs, the law requires USDA to instruct SNAP state agencies on how to ration available funding among SNAP recipients. To date, it remains unclear how such benefit reductions will be carried out.

The government shutdown has also restricted the way USDA administers the program. According to the Department's website, 95% of staff within the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) have been furloughed. Among other responsibilities, FNS is tasked with approving applications from retailers seeking authorization to accept SNAP payments. Several media reports indicate that FNS is not processing retailer applications nor providing technical assistance to store owners. This ever-worsening problem is exacerbating hunger in many rural and other disadvantaged areas.

Given the drastic impact this current situation will have on hunger in America, we ask for an immediate response to the following questions:

- (1) What are USDA's specific plans for administering SNAP after January 2019?
- (2) Without further appropriations, how will USDA instruct SNAP state agencies to reduce SNAP benefits for the month of February and beyond? What methods will be used to determine benefit reductions on a per recipient basis?
- (3) Are any SNAP retailer applications currently being processed? If not, when was the last application processed? How many submitted applications have yet to be processed?
- (4) USDA guidance was sent to SNAP state agencies and SNAP authorized retailers on December 26 and December 31, respectively. These guidance documents only address January benefits. Has USDA sent any additional guidance to either group? If not, what is the timeline for sending additional guidance?
- (5) Has USDA sent any guidance to SNAP recipients regarding the current situation, as the Department has previously done in similar scenarios? If not, what is the USDA's explanation for not doing so? When will updated guidance be available to SNAP recipients?

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



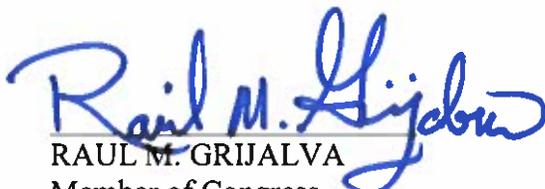
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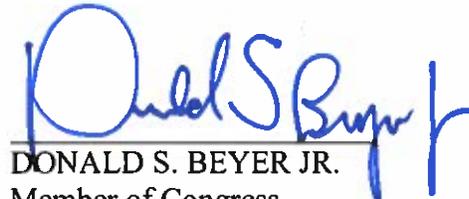

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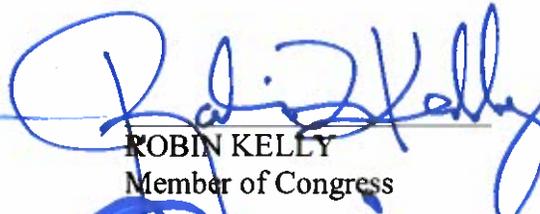

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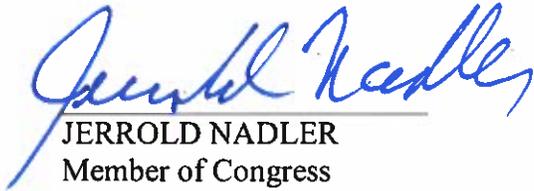
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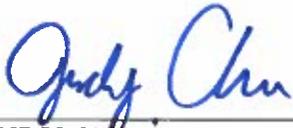
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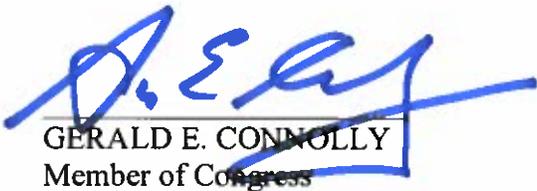
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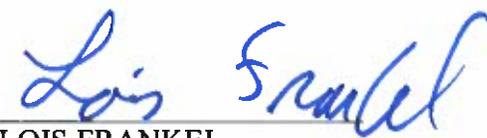
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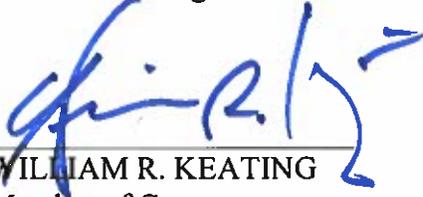
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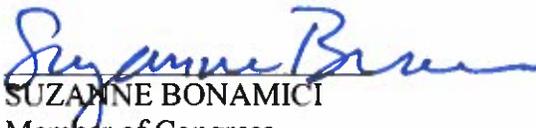
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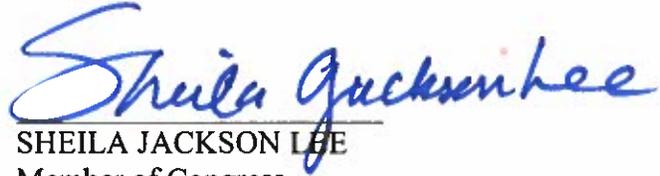
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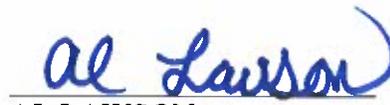
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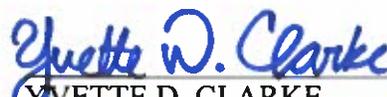
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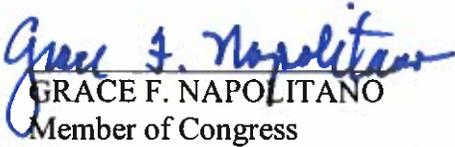
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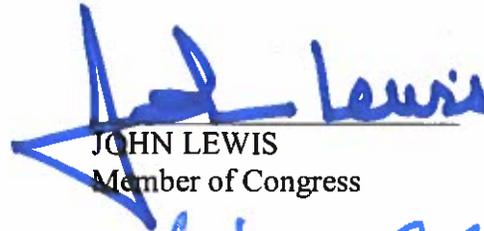
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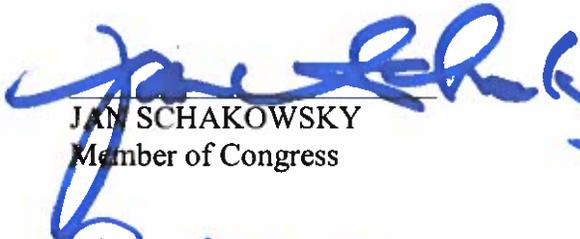
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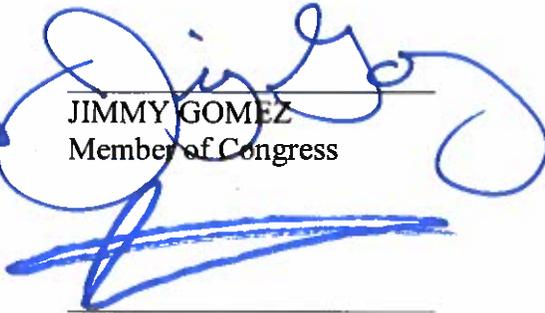
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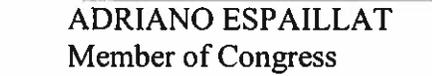
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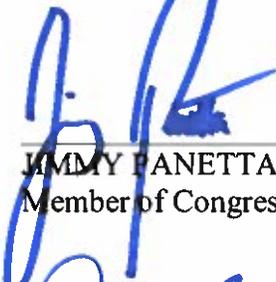
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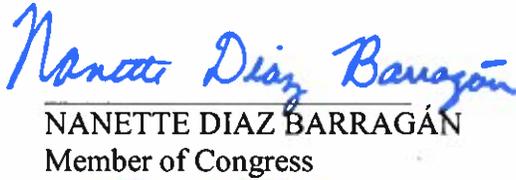
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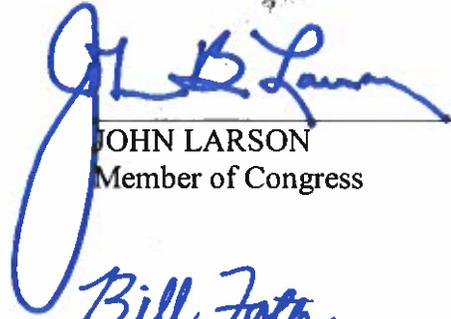
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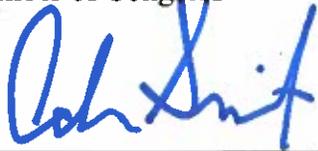
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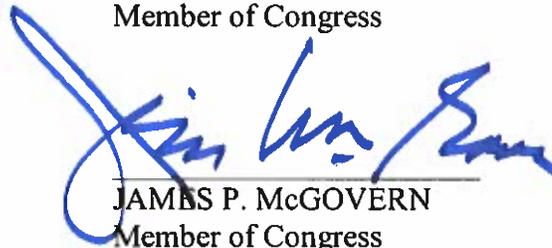
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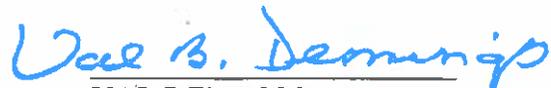


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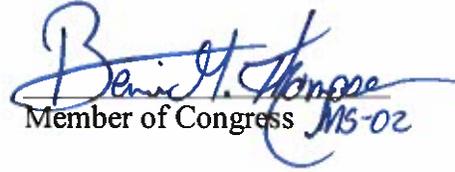
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