September 6, 2018

The Honorable Patrick Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United State Senate
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States Senate
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Mike Conaway
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Colin C. Petersen
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC, 20515

Re: Coalition Opposes Farm Bill Provisions that Create Obstacles to Reentry and Threaten Public Safety

Dear Chairmen Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Petersen,

As the House and Senate Conference Committee drafts a final Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, commonly referred to as the 2018 Farm bill, the undersigned organizations urge you to exclude provisions that would harm individuals reentering the community from incarceration and their families.

Both the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food assistance programs and Employment and Training (E&T) program play a critical role in helping individuals successfully transition from incarceration back into the community. We urge you to specifically exclude provisions that would:

1) Cut SNAP food assistance
2) Expand onerous work requirements for SNAP food assistance
3) Impose a permanent, lifetime ban on individuals convicted of certain crimes from accessing SNAP food assistance
4) Prohibit individuals convicted of drug felonies from working in the hemp industry.

Both SNAP food assistance and the SNAP E&T program have had a significant and positive impact on low income individuals reentering the community from incarceration and living under community supervision. Limiting access to food assistance and increasing employment barriers for returning citizens hinders successful reentry, increases recidivism\(^1\), reduces public safety, and increases food insecurity and hunger.

Maintaining access to SNAP food assistance and E&T benefits is critical to successful reentry. More than 600,000 people are released from state and federal prisons each year,\(^2\) and

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more than 4.5 million Americans live under some form of community supervision including parole or probation.\(^3\) These individuals living under community supervision experience significantly higher levels of food insecurity than others reliant upon SNAP food benefits, let alone the general public.\(^4\) SNAP food assistance and its E&T program help individuals returning to the community develop skills that lead to employment, thus reducing their own and their families’ reliance on SNAP food assistance. **Research indicates that restricting SNAP food assistance actually can increase recidivism.**\(^4\)

**Proposals to prohibit SNAP food assistance for individuals who do not meet increased work requirements would harm individuals with criminal records.** Nearly 1 in 3, or more than 70 million adults in the U.S. have a criminal record.\(^5\) Despite low national unemployment rates, individuals with criminal records struggle to find living wage jobs in part because of stigma against hiring individuals with criminal records, as well as local rules in some places limiting the employment of individuals with criminal records. Even securing volunteer positions often can be difficult. **Research shows that roughly half of returning citizens are still unemployed one year after release.**\(^6\) Making matters worse, increased work requirements that would reduce access to SNAP food assistance for individuals with criminal records **would reduce access to food for families, including children - more than half of individuals incarcerated in state prisons, and 63 percent of those in federal prisons, are parents.**\(^7\)

**Additionally, we strongly urge you to exclude the Holding amendment from the final 2018 Farm bill.** The Holding amendment would impose a harsh lifetime ban on SNAP food assistance for individuals with certain criminal records. The ban would prohibit SNAP food assistance for individuals who committed a single violent crime years or even decades ago and have since completed their sentence and complied with all terms of their release. Denying food assistance to individuals who have served their sentence for violent crime would impede rehabilitation and reintegration into society, while threatening the food security of the individuals as well as their families. Current law already denies food assistance to individuals who were found guilty of a violent crime if, after release from prison, they violate their parole or the terms of their release. An overwhelming majority of states – both Democratic and Republican led –

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have rejected the ban on SNAP food assistance for individuals with drug felony convictions because states recognize that such policies are difficult to administer, they don’t prevent crime, but they do increase hardship upon reentry, thus making it more difficult for individuals to reintegrate. Denying individuals food assistance only destabilizes them and their families while failing to improve public safety.

Similarly, the Farm Bill should not impose a ban on individuals with drug felony convictions from working in the cultivation or production of hemp. People should not be prevented from working, and in some cases lose their businesses, once they have served their time. The hemp felony ban would unfairly punish returning citizens who need job opportunities, especially in economically disadvantaged, rural communities where finding work can be particularly difficult. By approving the legalization of domestic hemp cultivation, the Senate farm bill recognizes the economic value and job creation potential of legal hemp cultivation. Returning citizens who have paid their dues to society should have the same opportunity to benefit from this new industry.

In recent years, bipartisan Congressional support for giving formerly incarcerated individuals a second chance has grown significantly. If Congress is to achieve the bipartisan goal of improving public safety by reducing recidivism and supporting long-term, successful reentry, food assistance is a critical part of this effort. We urge you to reject barriers that make it even more difficult for returning citizens to become fully engaged, productive, and tax-paying members of our society who are able to help care for their families and communities.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration of these important issues. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Jenny Collier at jcollier@colliercollective.org.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action
Alliance For Strong Families and Communities
American Civil Liberties Union
American Psychological Association
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Bread for the World
Campaign for Youth Justice
Center for Community Change Action
Center for Employment Opportunities
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Popular Democracy
Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
Coalition for Juvenile Justice

Coalition on Human Needs
College & Community Fellowship
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
County Welfare Directors Association of California
CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Drug Policy Alliance
Faith Action Network - Washington State
FAMM
FedCURE.org
Feeding America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
From Prison Cells to PhD
Heartland Alliance
Housing Action Illinois
Human Rights Watch
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
JustLeadershipUSA
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Legal Action Center
Mennonite Central Committee - Washington Office
MomsRising
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Action Network
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of County Human Services Administrators
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Association of Social Workers
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network
National Employment Law Project
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National H.I.R.E. Network
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Organization for Women
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Office of Social Justice for the Christian Reformed Church of North America
Poligon Education Fund
Safer Foundation
SAY San Diego (Social Advocates for Youth)
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Sentencing Project
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Treatment Communities of America
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ - Justice and Witness Ministries