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Hawaii Attorney General Joins Coalition to Stop SNAP Cuts That Would Leave Millions Hungry

HONOLULU – Hawaii Attorney General Clare E. Connors today joined a coalition of 24 Attorneys General and the Corporation Counsel of the City of New York in urging Congress to block the Trump administration’s attempts to cut vital food assistance for millions of Americans. In a letter to Congress, the coalition expressed support for provisions in the House-passed HEROES Act that would prohibit the use of appropriation funds for three U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administrative rules. The rules would cut food assistance under the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) by making it harder to qualify for SNAP food assistance benefits, reducing State flexibility to continue benefits beyond the three-month limit, and reducing benefit amounts for certain households. The coalition argues that, especially during this unprecedented time of economic turmoil due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Congress should work to protect and expand our nation’s largest anti-hunger program.

“We should be collectively working towards making sure everyone has access to nutritious food,” said Attorney General Connors. “It is imperative, even more so during a pandemic, that we oppose rules cutting food-assistance to millions of Americans.”

SNAP, previously known as “food stamps,” is our country’s most important anti-hunger program and a critical part of federal and state efforts to help lift people out of poverty. The program provides people with limited incomes the opportunity to buy nutritious food that they otherwise could not afford.

The current pandemic underscores the need to preserve SNAP food assistance. In March alone, 40 percent of American households with incomes below \$40,000 lost jobs, and from March 15 to May 15 of this year, 40.8 million Americans filed for unemployment. Unsurprisingly, the number of Americans applying for SNAP benefits has also spiked. As more Americans struggle to put food on the table with each passing

day, cuts to food assistance programs that millions need to survive would only compound the suffering of this public health emergency.

In the letter sent to leaders of the House and Senate, the multistate coalition urges Congress to block the Trump administration's three SNAP rules because they would:

- **Cut SNAP benefits for 700,000 Americans by restricting states from extending benefit time limits:** There is a three-month time limit on SNAP benefits for unemployed individuals aged 18 to 49 who are not disabled or raising children—"able-bodied adults without dependents" (ABAWDs). However, states can acquire a waiver of this time limit for areas where the unemployment rate is above 10 percent, or if it presents data demonstrating that the area lacks sufficient jobs for ABAWDs. The ABAWD waiver rule would push nearly 700,000 Americans off SNAP by forcing states to rely on broad unemployment rates—instead of localized job availability for low-income individuals—in order to extend SNAP benefits to needy individuals for more than three months. This rule is currently partially enjoined by a federal court after many states in this coalition brought suit, and Congress waived SNAP time limits during the public health emergency in the Families First Act. That common sense measure serves as a template for future congressional action pertaining to SNAP.
- **Remove 3.1 million Americans from SNAP by making it harder to qualify for benefits:** A long-standing policy known as "broad-based categorical eligibility" (BBCE) allows states to make low-income families automatically eligible for SNAP benefits if they have already qualified to receive certain other types of public assistance. Through BBCE, states can extend SNAP benefits to low-income families that slightly exceed the program's gross income and asset limits if they also have significant critical expenses, like childcare, housing, or education expenses. The Revision of Categorical Eligibility rule would eliminate SNAP benefits for 3.1 million Americans by restricting states' ability to use BBCE. Currently families are allowed to preserve basic emergency savings while maintaining their eligibility for food assistance under BBCE, but this rule would effectively require Americans to go completely broke before receiving SNAP benefits.
- **Reduce monthly benefits for SNAP households:** SNAP benefits are based on states' calculation of net income; the lower the net income, the higher the SNAP benefits. The Standardization of State Heating and Cooling Standard Utility Allowances rule would change how states can account for the costs of utilities, including home heating and cooling, as they calculate net income for SNAP household benefits. The change will result in 19 percent of SNAP households receiving lower SNAP monthly benefits and will disproportionately affect Americans who are uniquely vulnerable at this time—seniors and people with disabilities.

A copy of the letter is available here: [\[LINK\]](#)

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