



December 2, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition and Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition and Forestry  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1305 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Lucas, and Ranking Members Cochran and Peterson:

On behalf of Children's HealthWatch and ZERO TO THREE, organizations dedicated to improving the health and well-being of our nation's youngest children, we write to express serious concern about proposed changes in eligibility and benefits and overall funding cutbacks within the Farm Bill with regard to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Based on research that shows the harmful effects of inadequate nutrition on very young children as well as the proven benefits of SNAP for early development, we urge you to reject any provision that reduces program benefit allotments, restricts eligibility currently in place and/or alters the program's unique structure and ability to react quickly in times of widespread hardship.

Together, our organizations represent pediatricians, pediatric researchers, and experts in the field of early childhood development. Working on the front line of pediatric care, we see first-hand the short- and long-term impacts that poverty and food insecurity have on the healthy development of young children ages zero to three. Food insecurity during this sensitive period increases the risk for developmental delays, poor health, hospitalizations, and iron deficiency anemia, endangering future academic achievement and adult health and workforce participation. SNAP helps prevent these dangers: Children's HealthWatch research has shown that **young children in families that receive SNAP are more likely to be food secure, in good health and less likely to have developmental delays** compared to young children whose families are likely eligible for but not receiving SNAP<sup>1</sup>.

The November 1, 2013 SNAP cuts have already harmed the ability of families to adequately nourish their youngest children. Now is not the time for deeper cuts or changes that restrict access to benefits. We are very concerned about any proposals that would create barriers to participation or limit state options, including the elimination of categorical eligibility, which over 40 states have adopted, and the ability to coordinate the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and SNAP. These changes would result in direct cuts to SNAP benefits, and therefore lost meals, for millions of children and their families. We are also concerned about any provisions that impose punitive requirements, such as the Southerland provision, which would eliminate assistance for children of millions of adults who are willing to work and take a job or participate in job training, but cannot find a job or a training program slot.

These proposed eligibility changes and funding cuts would ultimately reduce the amount of food families are able to afford, essentially eliminating meals. This, in turn, would have very real and serious effects on the developing bodies and brains of young children. In economic terms, **sicker children need more health care resources – the average pediatric hospitalization costs \$11,000<sup>ii</sup>**. While we support efforts to utilize public spending in a prudent and fiscally responsible way, further cuts to SNAP benefits will harm children’s health and ultimately cost taxpayers more in the long-run to remediate the problems caused by inadequate nutrition in early life.

Without adequate support for nutrition and other assistance programs for families, our nation can expect accelerating disparities in the health and future prospects between children from low-income families and their higher-income peers. Reductions in benefits and program coordination moves policy backwards—away from clear evidence showing long-term benefits. We urge leaders in Congress instead to take steps to improve and simplify access to and coordination between benefit programs, streamlining systems to allow eligible families efficient access to all the assistance and benefits for which they qualify.

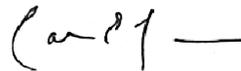
Our country’s future success depends on the strength and health of our children today. It is essential that we employ the measures needed to maximize the effectiveness of federal nutrition and non-nutrition programs, while supporting families’ ability to work and save for the future. When times are tough, it is especially important that we continue to invest in solutions that work to sustain all our children and give them a fair chance to develop to their full potential.

Thank you for your time and attention to our letter.

Sincerely,



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Children’s HealthWatch  
Boston, MA



**Matthew E. Melmed**  
Executive Director, ZERO TO THREE  
Washington, DC



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Philadelphia, PA



**Diana Becker Cutts, MD**  
Principal Investigator  
Minneapolis, MN



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Research Scientist and Principal Investigator  
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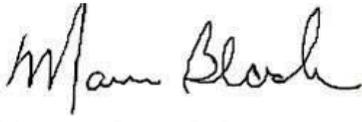
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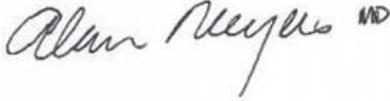
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**CC: Members of the 2013 Farm Bill Conference Committee**

[Children's HealthWatch](#) is a pediatric research group that monitors changes in economic conditions and public policies and their impact on the well-being of young children. We interview families in urban medical centers serving low-income populations in Baltimore, Boston, Little Rock, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia and have been providing original research and analysis from the frontlines of pediatric care to policy makers and the public for more than a decade.

For questions or further information, please contact Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, Children's HealthWatch Research and Policy Director, at [sedc@bu.edu](mailto:sedc@bu.edu) or 617-638-5850.

**ZERO TO THREE:** National Center on Infants, Toddlers, and Families, is a national, nonprofit organization that provides parents, professionals and policymakers the knowledge and know-how to nurture early development. Our mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life.

For questions or further information, please contact Patricia Cole, Director of Government Relations, at [PCole@zerotothree.org](mailto:PCole@zerotothree.org) or 202-857-2632.

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<sup>i</sup> March, E. L., Ettinger de Cuba, S., et al. Boost to SNAP Benefits Protected Young Children's Health. Children's HealthWatch. [http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/SNAPincrease\\_brief\\_October2011.pdf](http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/SNAPincrease_brief_October2011.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> *Care of Children and Adolescents in U.S. Hospitals, 2003* (HCUP Fact Book No. 4, Publication No. 04-0004. Accessed February 16, 2012. <http://archive.ahrq.gov/data/hcup/factbk4/factbk4b.htm#series>