

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 21, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to you expressing serious concerns with the latest Department of Agriculture (USDA) proposal to restrict states' flexibility in administering the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This proposal, which limits states' ability to set their own Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs) based on local experience with utility costs, would reduce benefits for nineteen percent of SNAP recipient households nationwide, and as many as 8,000 households could lose eligibility altogether. This proposed rulemaking would also disproportionately impact working families, the elderly and people with disabilities.

As members of the California delegation, we are particularly troubled that this proposed rulemaking is the third action this year in a series of attacks against states' authority to administer SNAP, known as CalFresh in our communities. CalFresh beneficiaries count on a federal food assistance program that takes into consideration the high cost of living, including households' energy costs, in communities across the state. As their representatives in Congress, we have worked hard to ensure low-income residents do not have to choose between paying for food or keeping their heat or electricity turned on.

Current policy allows states flexibility to determine how they calculate utility costs and rates. The proposed change would standardize these calculations and set the SUA to an amount lower than what would be needed to meet the costs of utilities for many Californians. Unsurprisingly, low-income Californians spend a disproportionate amount of their income on energy.

The proposed rule does not provide any evidence with respect to why this approach is preferable to California or any other state's methodology – methodologies that the USDA has reviewed and approved for more than thirty years. The USDA simply asserts that this change is preferable, despite the fact that it would result in fewer food benefits for millions of low-income Americans.

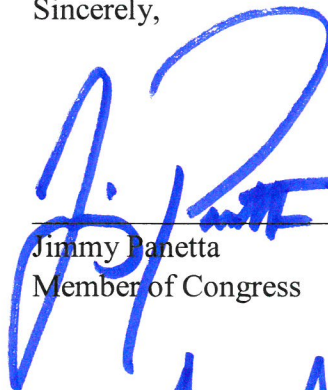
This most recent proposed rulemaking follows a USDA proposal to eliminate states' authority to use broad-based categorical eligibility to determine SNAP eligibility, along with a proposal to limit states' ability to waive work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents. Together, the previous two administrative changes received over 200,000 comments, including a comment letter outlining serious concerns from each of the undersigned Members of the California Congressional Delegation. Unfortunately, USDA has ignored this public outcry and continued with an agenda to weaken support systems for low-income Americans who are working hard to elevate their economic status.

Additionally, the Administration has proposed deep cuts to SNAP in its three budget proposals and, during 2018 Farm Bill negotiations, endorsed policy proposals that, if enacted, would have pushed millions of Americans off food assistance. We are disappointed that the USDA has now turned to rulemaking to pursue policy changes that Congress has consistently rejected.

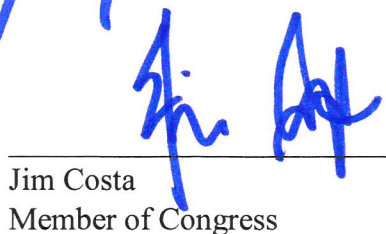
We are equally disappointed that, while this Administration touts its support for working families and for states' rights, each proposal to cut SNAP benefits is built on limiting states' authority to take into consideration the costs of living in their communities when administering SNAP.

As you receive and review the next set of public comments over the coming days and weeks, we urge you to reconsider all three proposals, which combined, are estimated to negatively impact over a million Californians, more than a quarter of the SNAP recipients in our state. We also urge you to think critically about the precedent established by these proposed changes when it comes to states' rights in our democracy. Ultimately, we ask that you act to quickly rescind each of these proposals and instead work alongside Congress to prevent hunger in our communities – in California and across the country.

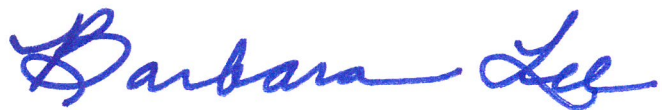
Sincerely,



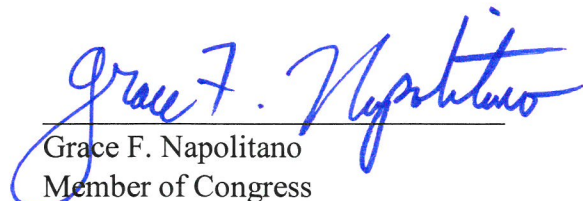
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



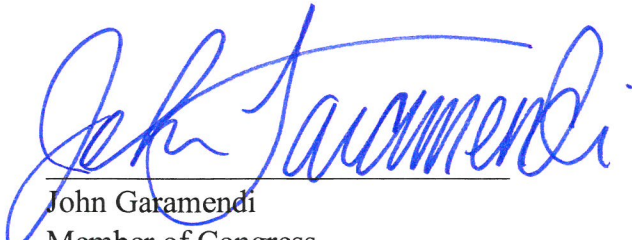
Jim Costa
Member of Congress



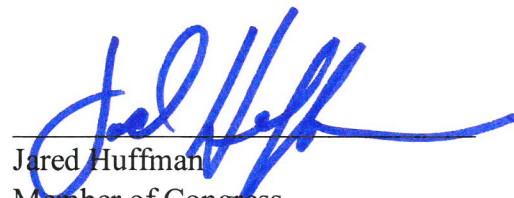
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



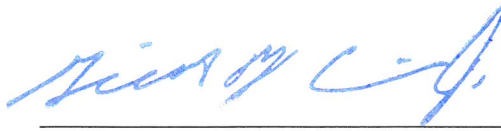
Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



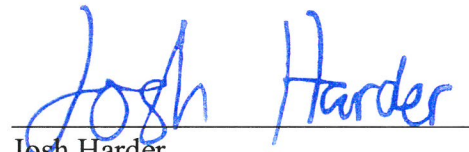
John Garamendi
Member of Congress



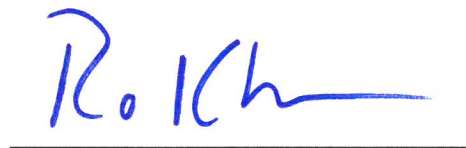
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Gilbert R. Cisneros
Member of Congress




Josh Harder
Member of Congress



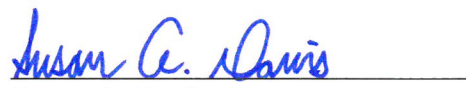
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



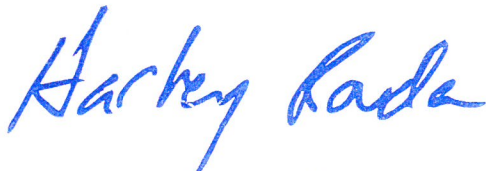
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



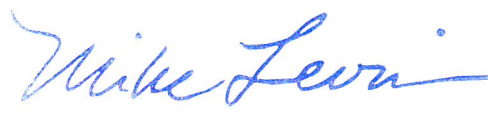
Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



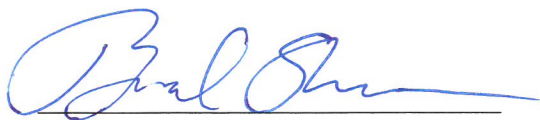
Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress



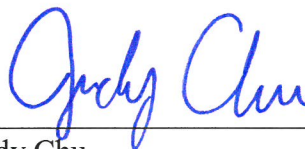
Harley Rouda
Member of Congress



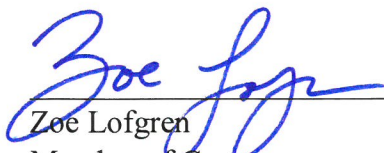
Mike Levin
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



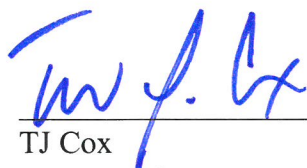
Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Katie Hill
Member of Congress



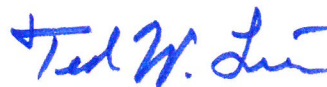
TJ Cox
Member of Congress



Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



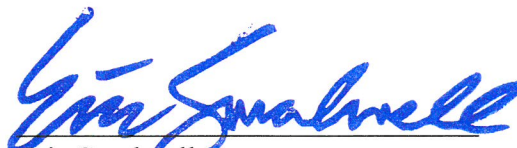
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



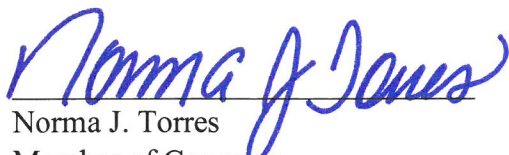
Ted Lieu
Member of Congress



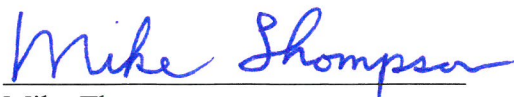
Scott Peters
Member of Congress



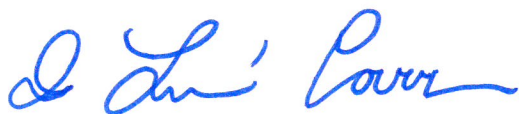
Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



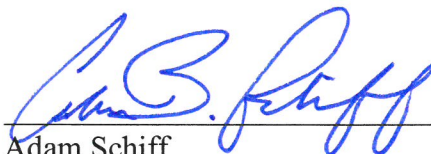
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



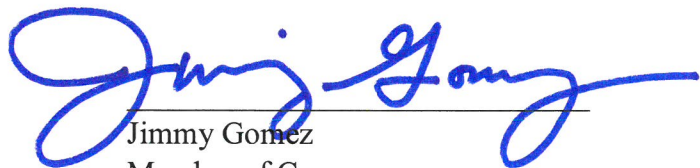
Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



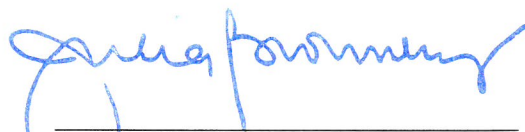
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



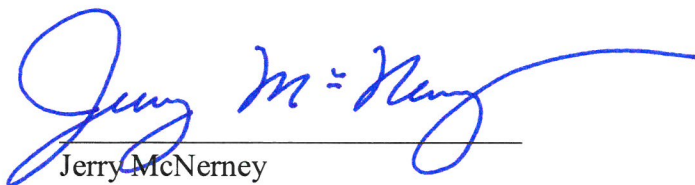
Adam Schiff
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



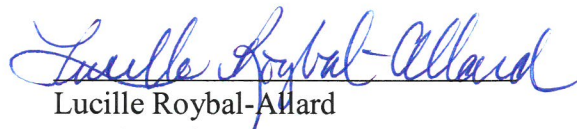
Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress



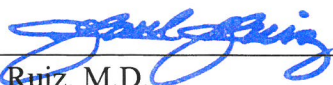
Ami Bera
Member of Congress



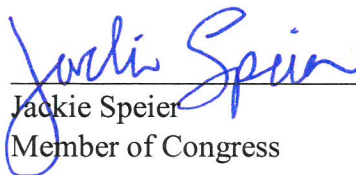
Mark Takano
Member of Congress



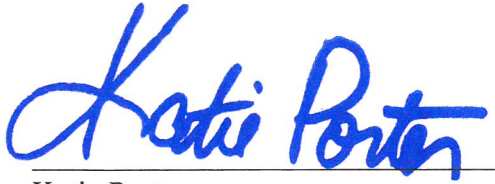
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress



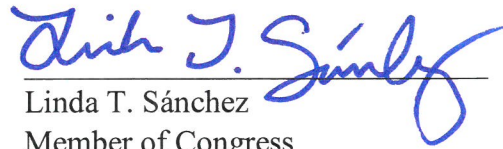
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Katie Porter
Member of Congress



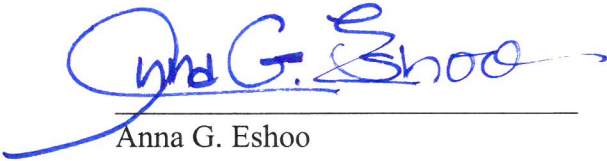
Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



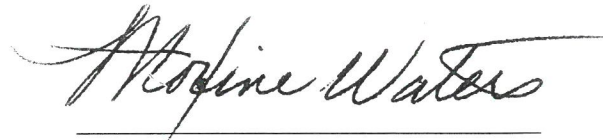
Karen Bass
Member of Congress



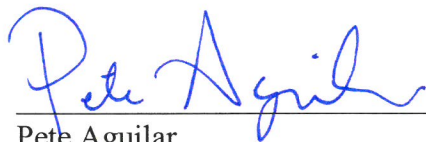
Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress