Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 19, 2012

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

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson,

As members of the Massachusetts delegation, we respectfully request that the Committee protect the current level of funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the 2012 Farm Bill, as well as maintain SNAP's current structure, eligibility requirements, and benefit levels.

We recognize and understand the difficult budgetary decisions before you and the importance of achieving savings through common sense reforms. However, Congress has had a long-standing bipartisan commitment to protecting low-income safety net programs, and we urge you to uphold that essential commitment.

SNAP is the cornerstone food assistance program for low-income households in America. In 2011, SNAP provided 46 million low-income Americans a nutritionally sufficient diet. Nearly one million low income residents of Massachusetts now depend on SNAP to put food on the table each day.

In today's economic climate, SNAP has never been more important. As we gradually recover from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, millions of families still struggle with hunger and poverty. When poverty and unemployment rates almost doubled from 2007 to 2011, SNAP participation correspondingly grew by 70 percent, as more families qualified for food assistance. In fact, according to the National Academy of Science poverty measures, SNAP kept about four million people out of poverty nationally in 2010, including 1.3 million children out of deep poverty.

SNAP also has one of the most rigorous quality control systems of any public benefit program as well as low administrative costs, with nearly 95 percent of federal spending going directly to beneficiaries to purchase food. It is an effective form of economic stimulus, growing the economy by $1.73 for every $1.00 invested.

Due to the effectiveness of SNAP, we strongly oppose both the House Agriculture Committee's reconciliation proposal to cut $33 billion from the program, and the House budget proposal that would cut SNAP by $133 billion over the next decade and convert the program into a block

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grant. Converting SNAP into a block grant would cause two million individuals to entirely lose their SNAP benefits, and result in reduced or eliminated benefits for millions more SNAP households. It would also prevent program from adding participants should their income drop from job loss, a reduction in work hours, or another future economic downturn.

We similarly oppose the Senate's recent actions to cut $4.49 billion from the program by limiting states' abilities to operate "Heat and Eat" policies. This program allows states, including Massachusetts, to simplify the eligibility and verifications required for receiving Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and SNAP benefits. Coordinating these benefits enables states to save resources and increase outreach, access and participation in both the LIHEAP and SNAP programs, particularly among seniors and Americans with disabilities. We also oppose any effort to cut funding for this program in the House version of the Farm Bill.

Limiting "Heat and Eat", as the Senate has proposed, will create paperwork inefficiencies on behalf of both applicants and administrators, discourage qualified individuals from entitled benefits, and ultimately reduce SNAP benefits by roughly $70 per month to over 100,000 Massachusetts residents. These cuts would ultimately force many struggling Americans to face a difficult choice between meals on the table or energy for their home. Seniors, individuals with disabilities, and residents of rural communities would be most impacted by this change.

Reducing SNAP benefits wrongly places the burdens of deficit reduction on those who can afford it least. With food banks already stretched thin and unable to make up the difference, cuts to vital food assistance programs such as SNAP will only serve to deepen the effects of poverty throughout the nation, limit purchasing power for millions of struggling Americans, and harm an already fragile economic recovery.

We look forward to working with you to pass a fiscally responsible Farm Bill that strengthens the SNAP program and supports our nation's families, senior citizens, and individuals with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey

Barney Frank

Barney Frank

Richard E. Neal

Richard E. Neal

John W. Olver

John Olver

John Tierney

Michael E. Capuano

Stephen F. Lynch

Niki Tsongas

William R. Keating