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**Faith Leaders Oppose Dangerous Changes to SNAP**

*Stricter Work Requirements in House Farm Bill Pose Imminent Risk of Increasing Hunger*

**April 18, 2017 (Washington, D.C)** – Today, multi-faith leaders voiced opposition to harmful changes to anti-hunger programs contained in the House Farm Bill. Released by Rep. Mike Conaway (R-TX), Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, the bill seeks to impose stricter work requirements as a prerequisite for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This approach is not only partisan, it puts millions of people at risk of hunger without providing substantive training and assistance for adults on the program to secure the sustainable employment it claims to promote. It will also deepen socioeconomic injustice, with people of color, people with disabilities, women and children to feel the greatest impact.

The faith leaders are members of the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs (DHN), a broad coalition of religious organizations and faith traditions working together to advance federal policies that will help eliminate the root causes of poverty and enable individuals to live with dignity, ensuring a secure future for themselves and their families.

DHN members stand united in their stance on damaging changes to SNAP in the House Farm Bill. Following are quotes from leaders in this group:

**Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World:** “We must oppose this bill as written because it proposes changes to SNAP that will put millions of women, children, and families at risk of hunger. Specifically, the bill imposes benefit and eligibility cuts in addition to stricter work requirements, in the name of getting SNAP recipients ‘back to work.’ It would require many people to attend job readiness programs, but the funding for these programs would not allow for job training that would actually get people into jobs. Congress must work toward a bipartisan farm bill that ensures any nationwide job training program is robust enough to be effective.”

**Rebecca Linder Blachly, Director, Office of Government Relations, The Episcopal Church:** “The Episcopal Church recognizes that employment is a powerful way for people to contribute to our society and to provide for themselves and their families; however, we cannot support the proposed reforms to the SNAP program that would reduce and restrict access to food assistance in order to pay for training. Our faith teaches that all children of God should be fed, and we do not believe this should be restricted so that people go hungry. While workforce development programs that address the growing skills gap and prepare Americans to succeed in careers with family supporting wages are critical, we urge the Agriculture Committee to ensure the SNAP program fulfills its mission of providing much-needed food assistance.”

**Rev. Jennifer Butler, CEO, Faith in Public Life, and former chair of the White House Council on Faith and Neighborhood Partnerships:** “The House Farm Bill represents a shameful and immoral attack on struggling families. SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger, especially for children, seniors and people with disabilities. Nearly two-thirds of people who rely on SNAP are under 18, over 60 or disabled.

Furthermore, most SNAP recipients who can work, do work. These benefits are designed to provide crucial assistance for low-wage workers and already have work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents. Jesus fed people. He recognized the immorality of hunger and always took action. Lawmakers who call themselves Christian should model Jesus' behavior."

**Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation:** "The House farm bill undermines fundamental Quaker values of equity and justice. This bill will increase the risk of hunger for individuals and families across America. It will force at least a million people off SNAP under the guise of strengthening work. SNAP is not a jobs program. It is an incredibly effective anti-hunger program. Threatening to take food away from people will not boost employment. Indeed, it will do the opposite. If Congress is serious about getting more people into the workforce, raising wages, and creating jobs, it should invest new funding in workforce development programs, instead of cutting federal funds for these programs. By tying food benefits to job requirements, this farm bill imposes barriers on people struggling to live with dignity. These barriers fall hardest on people with disabilities, people struggling to overcome addiction, people who are formerly incarcerated, people who lack reliable transportation or have caregiving responsibilities. This action lacks compassion and common sense. I urge all members of Congress to speak up and oppose such irresponsible and immoral policy."

**Abby Leibman, President & CEO, Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger:** "The Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018, otherwise known as the Farm Bill, is cruel and reinforces the vitriolic partisan rhetoric from 'leaders' in Washington D.C. who play politics with the lives of real people. Jewish text and tradition compel us to honor the dignity of every person, especially those who are struggling to feed themselves and their families. We urge Congress to ensure a 2018 Farm Bill that honors its bipartisan history and to cease efforts to undermine SNAP by rejecting proposals that will bring real harm to real people who struggle."

**Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO, National Council of Jewish Women:** "President Trump's new executive order (EO) has the completely misleading title of 'Reducing Poverty in America by Promoting Opportunity and Economic Mobility.' It is apparently based on the presumption that poor people could find jobs, that their disabilities will magically melt away, and that any mental illness will cease to be a barrier to gainful employment when they are deprived of food because they can't work. Existing barriers to work such as disability, lack of jobs, skills, education, child care, transportation, or other real handicaps are ignored by the president. And in fact 44 percent of households getting help from SNAP (the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program run by the Department of Agriculture) already have a member earning money, just not enough to feed everyone. Those affected will disproportionately women and people of color. Studies show the work requirements will end up pushing people off federal food assistance and deeper into poverty. What's worse, Trump's order instructs all federal departments to look for ways to impose work requirements on low-income Americans who benefit from federal programs he calls 'welfare.' It is an order designed not to end poverty, but to end aid to those most in need. Adding to this cruel EO is House Agriculture Committee Chairman Michael Conaway's (R-TX) draft farm bill that seeks to erode the effectiveness of SNAP. SNAP is the nation's most critical anti-hunger program, supporting 41 million working families, seniors, children, and individuals with disabilities. NCJW will continue to resist such punitive measures, instead working to ensure the promise of the American dream is a reality for those in greatest need."

**Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice:** "The Republican House Farm Bill is aptly named H.R.2. When paired with H.R.1 (the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act), the priorities of the House GOP couldn't be clearer. This attempt to take food off families' tables comes directly on the heels of passing \$1.9 trillion of tax breaks for corporations and the ultra-rich. This partisan bill is outrageous, stigmatizes people living in poverty, and flies in the face of Gospel values. It must be stopped before further harm is done to our nation and its people."

**Afif Rahman, Executive Director, Poligon Education Fund:** "House Agriculture Committee Chairman Michael Conaway's draft Farm Bill harms the health and lives of millions of struggling Americans who depend on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to put food on the table. SNAP has proven to be an

extremely important program and effective against hunger and food insecurity. Drowning it in excessive work requirements that will needlessly harm those who depend on the program to be contributing members of society and the workforce is counterproductive to promoting workforce development and economic growth. In Islam, we are taught that to save one life is to save all of humanity, and holding food ransom from millions of hungry people threatens millions of lives. Congress needs to shape up fast and draft a Farm Bill that protects and increases funding for SNAP and does not force Americans to decide between working and staying alive."

**Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Director, Office of Public Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):** "Our mandate as Presbyterians is to care for the least of these; Imposing work requirements on the SNAP program violates this mandate. Regardless of an individuals' ability to work, we insist that in the wealthiest country world there is food enough for everybody. "

**Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism:** "The House version of the farm bill undermines the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), one of the nation's most effective anti-poverty programs. Simply put, the harsh work requirements in the farm bill will leave more Americans hungry. The people who will be the most negatively impacted are those who are already the most vulnerable, including those who have unpredictable work schedules, live in areas with major obstacles to employment, and don't earn a living wage. We are guided by the injunction recited at the Passover Seder, the centuries-old traditional Jewish meal that Jews across the world observed just last week: 'Let all who are hungry come and eat.' These words inspire our modern commitment to protecting programs that reduce hunger and provide all those who suffer from hunger an opportunity to sustain themselves and their families. We urge members of the House to reject the farm bill's harmful attack on SNAP. In addition, as the Senate drafts its version of the farm bill, we urge Senators to commit to reducing hunger, to protect and strengthen SNAP, and to support all Americans who struggle with food insecurity."

**Sandy Sorensen, Director, United Church of Christ, Washington DC Office:** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides access to food for millions of Americans. The House introduced Farm Bill includes onerous work requirements that will potentially limit access to these essential services to many in need. The most vulnerable need our compassion, not contempt and they need access to nutrition services without unreasonable requirements. Essentially the House farm bill is a poorly disguised effort to kick millions off of the SNAP rolls. Following the justice witness of our United Church of Christ General Synod, we are committed to ensuring that our sisters and brothers, neighbors and children, have access to the food they need to pursue a life of dignity and purpose. We are reminded of our sacred scripture that says, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."(James 2:14-18.)

**Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary, The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society:** "Providing food for those suffering from hunger is central to our Christian faith. The United Methodist Church understands this call "not simply as a matter of charity, but of responsibility, righteousness, and justice." We recognize that hunger is rooted in human-created systems and requires a collective response by individuals, faith communities, organizations and governments. The Farm Bill introduced in the House would undercut a cornerstone of the federal response by creating barriers to access and eroding the effectiveness of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—ending or cutting benefits for millions of our neighbors. In a country as wealthy as the United States and coming on the heels of tax cuts that showered benefits on the wealthiest among us, efforts to further stigmatize and penalize those struggling in poverty are unconscionable and immoral."