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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

Subcommittee on Government Operations

Hearing on “SNAP: Examining Efforts to Combat Fraud and Improve Program Integrity”

June 9, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I support the efforts of this Committee to improve how the government serves the American people. However, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has proven to be effectively managed to reduce fraud and misuse, and our oversight efforts are better directed elsewhere.

There is no evidence of widespread SNAP fraud. Actually, the evidence suggests that the Department of Agriculture (USDA) investigates potential fraud aggressively. State anti-fraud efforts are also functioning as effectively as possible despite difficulties in conducting fraud investigations due to reduced funding and staff levels.

Those anti-fraud efforts are important, because SNAP benefits are a vital part of the safety net. SNAP provides people at or below 130 percent of the poverty line—which is currently an annual income of \$26,100 for a family of three—on average, \$127 per month toward an affordable, adequate diet. About 70% of SNAP participants are families with children, and 25% are in households with seniors and people with disabilities.

SNAP’s also protects the overall economy. Because SNAP is an entitlement and provides money to people who need it, they spend it—on food. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) found that, among policies implemented by Congress to stimulate economic growth and create jobs during times of economic lag, the SNAP program has one of the largest increases in economic activity and employment per budgetary dollar spent.

According to Census Bureau data, SNAP kept five million Americans out of poverty during the recession which followed the 2008 financial crisis. Since then, SNAP spending fell by seven percent in 2014, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that reduced caseloads will continue in 2016 because of the stronger economy.

I understand the concerns of my Republican colleagues to ensure that the SNAP program continues to work efficiently. I too want to eliminate the small percentage of bad actors who misrepresent facts about themselves or their households in order to obtain benefits.

I find the House Majority's recent proposal in the War on Poverty extremely troubling.

The answer to completely eliminating fraud in the SNAP program is not converting it into a block grant program. Actually, block granting SNAP is probably the first step to eliminating SNAP. That could be the fate of a number of safety net programs, such as child welfare services, and elderly services. They were put together into the Social Services Block Grant. This year, the Republican budget eliminates that block grant.

I would welcome the opportunity to work with my Republican colleagues to find ways to improve the SNAP program, seeing as it actually serves more constituents in their districts than in those of their Democratic counterparts. The absence of widespread fraud and the tiny potential savings from SNAP belie this purported interest in oversight. This hearing simply is another attack on America's working class. I hope that the witnesses today will give greater clarity in our efforts to improve program integrity rather than construct greater barriers to access for Americans who are working to make ends meet.

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