

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<http://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement
Congressman Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Intergovernmental Affairs
Joint Hearing on “Program Integrity in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program”

May 9, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is our country’s most important anti-hunger program. SNAP reduces poverty and food insecurity and improves health and economic outcomes for over 42 million hungry Americans, especially children.

People receive an average of only \$1.40 per meal through SNAP. In order to receive assistance, they must complete a detailed application process which includes providing documentation on income, identity, immigration status and address. Nearly 90 percent of participants are in households with children under the age of 18, or elderly persons 60 years or older, or an individual with disabilities.

In my home state of Maryland, over 696,000 people benefit from the program. In my district alone, more than 15,000 households receive SNAP benefits. SNAP allows families to purchase nutritious meals in several retailer locations including farmers markets. This is a program that should matter to every Member of Congress. Americans in every single congressional district benefit from SNAP. In fact, about 68,143 households in the Chairmen’s districts in Ohio and Alabama receive SNAP benefits.

It is no coincidence that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are holding this hearing one week before the 2018 Farm bill is slated for floor consideration. That bill would impose draconian new requirements that would prevent more than 2 million Americans in need from receiving food aid under SNAP – all in a thinly veiled attempt to deliver on Speaker Ryan’s quest for so-called welfare reform.

Contrast that approach with the fact that today’s hearing comes just months after Republicans passed a \$1.5 trillion tax cut that will give the wealthiest 1% of tax filers \$84 billion in 2019 alone.

As it turns out, this tax cut could finance the **entire** SNAP program for nearly 1 and a half years. In Fiscal Year 2017 the cost of the entire SNAP program was over \$68 billion.

I find it touching that my colleagues in the majority can give away billions in tax dollars to corporate investors who don't actually need it and don't have to prove that they're working to receive their tax bonanza, while at the same time planning to increase work requirements and cut food aid for Americans who are hungry.

True to form, my colleagues will try to justify cuts to SNAP with allegations of fraud and abuse. Old stereotypes die hard. In fact, SNAP has one of the lowest fraud rates at less than 5 percent. Over the past several years, USDA has taken aggressive steps to improve SNAP oversight and work with states on rooting out waste. USDA has brought down the rate of trafficking to about 1% of benefits over the last 20 years.

Everyone agrees that waste, fraud, and abuse needs to be rooted out. If we're searching for egregious examples in need of our immediate attention – they aren't found in SNAP. The most waste, fraud and abuse found across the federal government is at the Pentagon, but we aren't having hearings on that this year.

An internal report issued by the independent Defense Business Board found \$125 billion in immediate savings available by cutting administrative waste. That's almost twice the entire budget of SNAP.

These proposed cuts to SNAP are unjustified and harmful. But they are also obscene in a year when Congress forked over billions of dollars to billionaires.

SNAP feeds millions of children, seniors, and people with disabilities—including veterans. SNAP is efficiently run. If SNAP did not exist, we would have to create a program to do what SNAP does.

I hope that today's hearing can shed light on the necessity, efficiency, and desirability of SNAP, and that we can ensure that the more than 42 million Americans depending on this vital program can continue to feed their families.

Thank you.

Contact: Aryele Bradford, Deputy Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.