

# Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

June 7, 2021

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity among college students was estimated to be between 10 and 48 percent, depending on the specific campuses being surveyed, with several multi-campus surveys putting the prevalence between 30 and 40 percent.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) December 2018 report on food insecurity among college students found that almost 2 million at-risk students who were potentially eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) did not report receiving benefits in 2016.<sup>2</sup> According to GAO's analysis, many low-income students have multiple risk factors for food insecurity and may benefit from receiving food assistance in order to complete their education, but they face barriers in accessing SNAP benefits. This situation was likely exacerbated by high unemployment during the COVID-19 crisis.

Under Section 702(e) of the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act*<sup>3</sup>, passed in December 2020, college students eligible for federal or state work-study or students with an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of zero were provided access to SNAP benefits. This was a temporary measure that removed some SNAP eligibility restrictions for college students during a time of national emergency. After the national emergency ends, college students will again face myriad eligibility restrictions to accessing SNAP benefits, despite the fact that more than half of students are financially independent from their parents<sup>4</sup> and more than one in four college students are parents themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Given that the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics is likely to release new data on food insecurity among college students based on their 2020 National Post-Secondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) in early 2022 and that the Farm Bill is up for reauthorization in 2023, we feel the time is right to re-examine SNAP eligibility restrictions with respect to college students. We are writing to ask GAO to examine the extent of college student food insecurity, enrollment in SNAP among eligible college students, and how college students were affected by the removal of certain eligibility restrictions to SNAP

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Blagg, Kristen, Craig Gunderson, et al., *Assessing Food Insecurity on Campus*, Urban Institute (Aug. 2017); Goldrick-Rab, Sara, Jed Richardson, and Anthony Hernandez, *Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Insecurity on Campus*. Wisconsin HOPE Lab (March 2017); and Dubick, James, Brandon Matthews, and Clare Cady, *Hunger on Campus: The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students*, College and University Food Bank Alliance (March 2016).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits*, GAO-19-95 (Dec. 21, 2018).

The National Post-Secondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) includes self-reported participation in federal assistance programs. However, since it is not cross-validated with SNAP recipient information from USDA, GAO used 'reported/did not report' to signal this is not based on actual SNAP enrollment data.

<sup>3</sup> Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, Pub. L. No. 116-260, § 702 (2020).

<sup>4</sup> GAO 19-95, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> GAO 19-95, p.6.

for college students during the COVID-19 national emergency. We also ask that GAO assess the considerations and implications of extending this policy after the COVID-19 emergency ends. Specifically, we request that GAO assess:

- The prevalence of food insecurity among college students using 2020 NPSAS data and how food insecurity among college students correlates with SNAP eligibility, zero EFC, and work-study eligibility.
- To the extent possible, the effect of temporary expanded SNAP eligibility during COVID-19 including, if available, whether and how SNAP enrollment among college students increased.
- Considerations for targeting SNAP benefits to food insecure college students, e.g., whether eligibility based on a zero EFC or some other characteristic would best target those college students who are most in need.
- The extent to which the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Education have coordinated to implement the temporary SNAP eligibility relief measures afforded to college students during the pandemic and the effectiveness of those efforts.

Thank you for your attention to this request. Please contact Alison Hard with the House Committee on Education and Labor at [Alison.Hard@mail.house.gov](mailto:Alison.Hard@mail.house.gov) or Lisa Shelton with the House Agriculture Committee at [Lisa.Shelton@mail.house.gov](mailto:Lisa.Shelton@mail.house.gov) with any questions. Please direct all official correspondence to both Rasheedah Hasan, Chief Clerk, for the House Committee on Education and Labor at [Rasheedah.Hasan@mail.house.gov](mailto:Rasheedah.Hasan@mail.house.gov) and to Dana Sandman at [Dana.Sandman@mail.house.gov](mailto:Dana.Sandman@mail.house.gov) for the House Agriculture Committee.

Sincerely,



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**ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT**  
Chairman  
Committee on Education and Labor  
House of Representatives



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**DAVID SCOTT**  
Chairman  
Committee on Agriculture  
House of Representatives