

United States Senate

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December 2, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

RE: *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Standardization of State Heating and Cooling Standard Utility Allowances* (FNS-2019-0009) Proposed Rule

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write today in opposition to the Food and Nutrition Service's most recent proposal concerning the standardization of State Heating and Cooling Standard Utility Allowances (HCSUA)—the third major proposed revision to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) this year—which would once again have a tremendously negative effect on SNAP beneficiaries in the State of Maine. The net loss in SNAP benefits would be the second worst in the country. I urge the Department to carefully consider the comments submitted by the State of Maine and to withhold finalization of the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Standardization of State Heating and Cooling Standard Utility Allowances* Proposed Rule.

Maine is one of the most food-insecure states in the country. While the State of Maine has made strides in recent years in the fight against hunger, any steps forward are threatened by sustained cuts to SNAP benefits, such as those proposed in the HCSUA proposed rule. The HCSUA proposed rule, along with the Broad Based Categorical Eligibility proposed rule, would undermine efforts to reduce food insecurity, and worsen the struggles that low-income families face in meeting food and other household costs.

Because Maine is a state with high energy costs and has a large percentage of older homes with low energy efficiency, the effect of the HCSUA proposal on SNAP beneficiaries in Maine would be harmful and widespread. The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) estimates that nearly half of SNAP households would lose more than \$50 per month in benefits. Once again, Maine would be one of the hardest-hit states in terms of benefit losses.

Not only does the proposed HCSUA rule threaten the well-being of a substantial percentage of vulnerable families in Maine, it would also hurt Maine's economy and charitable food system. According to Maine DHHS, the proposed rule would account for an estimated net loss in benefits of almost fourteen percent, which is equivalent to a statewide reduction of more than two million dollars in benefits each month. Food banks and other charitable food sources, which are already operating at maximum capacity, would definitely not be able to keep up with

increased demand if half of Maine's SNAP households were to experience a sizable reduction in benefits.

The HCSUA Proposed Rule's negative effect on vulnerable families, the economy, and Maine's charitable food system significantly outweighs any benefits that would result from standardization. I urge the Department to reconsider the *Standardization of State Heating and Cooling Standard Utility Allowances* Proposed Rule.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your attention to addressing the concerns raised by the Maine DHHS in its comments submitted on November 18, 2019.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan M. Collins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" and the last name "Collins" being more prominent than the middle initial "M".

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator