

Good morning Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Dan Giacomi, and I am the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Administration (SNAP) Manager for the Connecticut Department of Social Services.

I am honored to appear before you today to offer testimony concerning the 2018 Farm Bill's impact on SNAP as well as recommendations for the Farm Bill reauthorization that I believe will strengthen, modernize, and streamline this critical and successful program utilized by millions of Americans each month.

In Connecticut we currently provide SNAP assistance to nearly 376,690 individuals, or over one in ten residents, residing in over 217,000 households in all 169 towns.

Through this, we see that SNAP significantly reduces food insecurity in our state and is one of the most effective tools at our disposal to boost the food industry and broader economy quickly and efficiently—particularly during times of economic downturns—We also see how SNAP improves health outcomes and supports individuals in all aspects of life, by providing essential nutrition to many working families, children, and elderly adults.

First, we would like to commend Congress for the actions taken in the 2018 Farm Bill that gave Connecticut, and all states, the tools we so critically needed to meet the unprecedented and unexpected challenges we have faced in recent years.

In addition, the temporary flexibilities Congress enacted to increase SNAP benefits and adjust administrative rules early in the public health emergency meant that we could preserve access to meaningful food assistance benefits for families while operating under the social and economic disruptions we experienced early in the pandemic.

We firmly believe that the actions Congress took were fundamental to SNAP being one of the true success stories of our country's pandemic response.

This has undoubtedly supported the health and well-being of millions of Americans, but also is key to supporting local retailers in the economic recovery.

Food insecurity in Connecticut, like many states, rose significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from a report published in September 2021 by our partners at CT Foodshare Incorporated showed an overall 31% increase in food insecurity one year into the pandemic in our state.

The 2018 Farm Bill has helped state agencies strengthen the impact of SNAP in many ways, both here in Connecticut and nationwide.

As you look ahead to the next reauthorization of the Farm Bill, the experiences of administering the SNAP program during the 2018/2019 government shutdown and the subsequent pandemic have demonstrated the value and importance of program innovations, some of which that should be made permanent, but has also revealed additional steps that could be taken to strengthen the program in the future, making it more resilient in times of greater need and able to include vulnerable groups that have long been overlooked.

Significant improvements can and should be considered in areas that would foster innovation, streamline service delivery, and simplify the administration of the program, as well as ensure its integrity and stability.

While not a comprehensive list, I'll briefly touch on 5 areas in which I believe this committee and Congress should consider during the reauthorization:

- First and foremost, it is critical that we preserve access to Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility and the alignment of services with programs such as TANF and the National School Lunch Program as doing so greatly simplifies access to SNAP especially for children, working families, seniors, and people with disabilities.
- Second, we should build upon and make permanent proven demonstration projects, which streamline access to SNAP for vulnerable households while

simultaneously cutting down on administrative expenses and increasing timeliness of case processing.

- We also need to modify and expand the policies around access to SNAP benefits for college students and veterans with disabilities.

We should allow for the purchase of hot/prepared foods outside of the Restaurant Meals Program. Allowing this outside of a fast-food setting, such as the salad bar in grocery stores, or the often talked about rotisserie chicken, would give these individuals and all SNAP recipients the same flexibility that other Americans depend upon.

- Finally, the adaptations made over the past two years in response to the public health emergency have helped us better understand ways we can adjust program rules to meet the needs of our customers more flexibly.

Opportunities are needed to further test and evaluate innovative approaches to SNAP administrative functions such as cross enrollment provide space for states to transition out of the public health emergency leveraging the lessons we have learned.

At the same time that we focus on common sense approaches to simplifying SNAP, states are committed to maintaining program integrity as a top priority.

Looking ahead, Congress can assist states in their efforts to promote program integrity by helping equip them with tools that help maintain accuracy and prevent fraud in the program.

For example, I urge the Committee to support the USDA in advancing strategies that help states use third-party income databases to quickly identify earned income of SNAP participants, both improving program integrity and streamlining the enrollment process for households.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, during a time when our aging workforce continues to grow and the number of individuals leaving the workforce increases,

as well as a time where the Farm Bill is up for reauthorization, we collectively are at an inflection point where we have both tremendous opportunities to modernize and streamline the SNAP program to provide more equitable and effective services while also facing significant workforce challenges and complex requirements that threaten to stymie progress.

The actions of this committee, through the reauthorization of the Farm Bill in 2023, will play a crucial role in helping to unlock the potential advancements we can make in SNAP in the coming years, modernizing the program and its eligibility requirements while not sacrificing program integrity.

Thank you for your time and your work on this critical program.

I'm happy to take any questions you may have.