



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
Advancing Excellence for All Native Students



September 10, 2013

The Honorable John Boehner,  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
232 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi,  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
204 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

*Re: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*

Dear Speaker Boehner and Minority Leader Pelosi,

On behalf of the National Indian Education Association, the National Congress of American Indians, the National Indian Child Welfare Association, the National Indian Health Board, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, the United South and Eastern Tribes, the Alaska Federation of Natives, the Alaska Inter-Tribal Council, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, and the Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium, we ask you to uphold the federal trust responsibility to tribes by protecting critical assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provide tribal citizens a means to prevent hunger and related hardships.

From 2007 through 2011, the poverty rate for American Indians and Alaska Natives was 27 percent, nearly double the national poverty rate. In nine states with large tribal populations, the poverty rate exceeded 30 percent. Similarly, tribal citizens often face more obstacles in acquiring an adequate diet than other American citizens. Tribal citizens are more than twice as likely as any other demographic to depend on SNAP assistance to meet basic food needs.

In 2008, nearly 1 in 4 American Indians and Alaska Natives were considered food insecure, compared to only 1 in 7 Americans overall. Food insecurity can impact a child's health and create behavioral and psychological conditions, which may lead to decreased achievement outcomes. SNAP assistance – through alleviating hunger – provides students a means to succeed and become successful citizens and community leaders. Therefore, decreasing SNAP funding would disproportionately threaten the ability for tribal communities to prosper.

Unfortunately, the SNAP proposal that is expected on the floor of the House of Representatives in September would reduce SNAP assistance by over \$40 billion. If enacted, the proposal would:

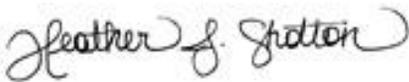
- Require states to impose a three-month limit to SNAP for childless, nondisabled adults who are unable to find work. Currently, states are eligible to waive the time restriction in areas with lingering high unemployment rates;
- Allow states to end SNAP benefits to most adults who are receiving or applying for SNAP – including parents with children as young as 1 year old – if they are not working or participating in a work or training program for at least 20 hours per week; and
- Cut critical funding for SNAP's nutrition education program (SNAP-Ed), which promotes healthy eating choices for low-income households. After a 28% budget cut in FY 2013, SNAP-Ed would be reduced by \$26 million in FY 2014.

States have traditionally used their authority to waive the time limit on receiving benefits for many American Indian reservations with persistently high unemployment rates. For example, when the national unemployment rate averaged 5.5 percent in 2004, Arizona, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming used their authority to waive the time limit for individuals living on reservations because tribal unemployment rates consistently remained above the national average. As the U.S. continues to face higher national unemployment rates resulting from the 2009 recession, repealing the waiver option would threaten SNAP benefits to over four million individuals – an unequal share of whom are American Indians and Alaska Natives.

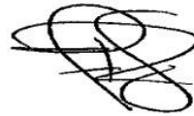
By allowing states to terminate SNAP benefits for those out of work, the proposal essentially authorizes states to cut off an entire family's food aid if the parents cannot find a job or job training position. The proposal also provides states the financial incentive to end assistance because state governments could then retain half the federal savings from removing people from SNAP. Therefore, the proposal would only exacerbate the condition of tribal citizens in poverty who may be unable to access other assistance programs due to geographical isolation or programmatic restrictions.

Our organizations respectfully urge you to oppose this SNAP proposal. We ask that you uphold the federal government's trust responsibility – a sacred obligation memorialized in treaties, the U.S. Constitution, U.S. Supreme Court cases, and federal statutes – which includes a federal duty to ensure the protection of moral obligations and trust toward Indian tribes. Currently, the proposal contradicts this responsibility to tribes and essentially penalizes their children who need food and unemployed citizens who want work but cannot find jobs.

Sincerely,



Dr. Heather Shotton, President  
National Indian Education Association



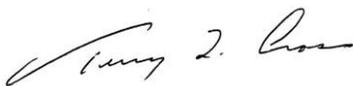
Fawn Sharp, President  
Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians



Jefferson Keel, President  
National Congress of American Indians



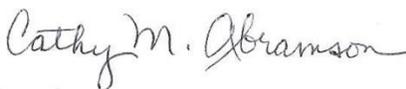
Brian Patterson, President  
United South and Eastern Tribes



Terry Cross, Executive Director  
National Indian Child Welfare Association



Julie Kitka, President  
Alaska Federation of Natives



Cathy Abramson, Chairperson  
National Indian Health Board



Delice Calcote, Executive Director  
Alaska Inter-Tribal Council



Carrie Bill, President & CEO  
American Indian Higher Education Consortium



W. Ron Allen, Board President  
Self-Governance Communication &  
Education Tribal Consortium