



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT: Jordan Rubin  
EMAIL: [jordanr@northwestharvest.org](mailto:jordanr@northwestharvest.org)  
TELEPHONE: 206.923.7426  
TWITTER: @nwharvest  
FACEBOOK: [Facebook.com/NWHarvest](https://www.facebook.com/NWHarvest)  
WEB: [northwestharvest.org](http://northwestharvest.org)



# HELP US FIGHT HUNGER: PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN SNAP

*Official Statement from Northwest Harvest in Response to U.S. Senate Budget*

(Seattle, WA – October 20, 2017) Northwest Harvest, Washington’s leading independent hunger relief agency, is honored to partner with 375 food pantries, meal programs, and high-need schools throughout our state in supplying nutritious food to our neighbors in need. The simple act of providing food for a healthy meal to someone who has fallen on hard times can do so much for that person: it provides comfort, lifts the spirits, and contributes to good physical and mental health that is vital to get back on one’s feet.

But we also know that our work and the work of our partners across the state is not and cannot be the only solution to hunger in our communities. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, “food stamps”) is our first line of defense against hunger. SNAP puts food on the table for 1 in 7 Washingtonians. In our state, more than 62% of SNAP participants are in households with children; almost 29% have family members who are elderly or have a disability. SNAP has risen to the occasion, supplementing households with low or seasonal earnings: 80% of Washington’s SNAP families have had at least 1 or more members working within the past year.

We know that our charitable efforts work hand in hand with SNAP to stave off hunger. Our combined efforts help people like Arlene, a senior citizen from Othello, Washington. Arlene’s sole income comes from a monthly Social Security Disability check of just \$700, and over half of that – \$450 to be exact – goes towards paying her rent, leaving her with \$250 to cover other expenses like utilities, health care for her diabetes, and food. Food stamps help, but she exhausts them before the last week of each month. Cuts to food stamps are truly life-threatening for Arlene who said, “I’m really scared that they’ll lower it more, and I don’t know how I’ll survive if they do.”

We don’t know how Arlene and tens of thousands of other Washingtonians will survive if Congress cuts SNAP. Earlier this month, the House passed a budget resolution that cuts SNAP by \$150 billion over the next ten years and orders an additional \$10 billion cut from agriculture programs that will most likely be sought from SNAP too.

This week, the Senate passed a budget that would seek \$4.3 trillion in cuts from basic needs services. Now the House and Senate will need to reconcile the differences between their two budgets in order to have a fast-track process to pass deficit-raising tax cuts. The loss of revenue will likely make harsh cuts to programs that primarily help low and middle-income Americans a reality.

We are proud of our efforts that put food into food banks in communities all across this state, but we know that SNAP is there when food banks can’t help. SNAP buys food in stores that are open 7 days a week; food banks, especially ones in small towns and rural areas, may be open only once or twice a week, sometimes open once a month. Food banks give food for free, but SNAP purchases put money back into our economies. In 2016, SNAP pumped \$1.5 billion back in Washington state’s economy, sustaining the businesses of our grocers and our growers; creating jobs and economic opportunities.

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We ask you to join us in calling on our Congressional delegation to recognize the importance that SNAP plays for all of us, for our state's economy, and for the health of our communities. With this understanding, Congress must reject a budget agreement that endangers our communities and our state with harsh cuts to SNAP, cuts that would create an insurmountable chasm for struggling families and for which our hardworking charitable system is not even remotely a match. Tell Congress to work together to pass a bipartisan budget that protects SNAP and basic needs programs from structural changes and funding cuts. In this way, all Washingtonians will have access to the support that is needed to for economic growth and self-sufficiency.

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#### **ABOUT NORTHWEST HARVEST**

Northwest Harvest is Washington's home-grown food bank distributor. Each month, Northwest Harvest provides more than two million nutritious meals and supports a statewide network of more than 375 food banks, meal programs, and high-need schools – focusing on consistent, nutritious, culturally-sensitive foods critical to both the body and mind. Throughout its 50 years, Northwest Harvest has grown from a project of local social activists to its position today as the leader in fighting hunger in the state of Washington. For more information, please visit [www.northwestharvest.org](http://www.northwestharvest.org).