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HOUSE FARM BILL TAKES FOOD AWAY FROM 60,000 WASHINGTON RESIDENTS
Proposed Legislation Hits Working Families Hardest

(Seattle, WA – May 14, 2018) The US House of Representatives is expected to vote as soon as this week on a bill that would take away Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) benefits from about 60,000 people in 25,000 households in Washington. This would result from restricting an option the state uses to extend benefits to SNAP eligible, working families with modest earnings, according to a new analysis from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The option, called “categorical eligibility,” allows states to raise their SNAP gross income cutoff and provide SNAP benefits to these low-income working families, providing on average about $100 a month to put food on their tables. In 2008, Washington elected to use categorical eligibility, allowing a household of 3 with a monthly income of $2,743, to apply for SNAP because in a high-cost state like ours, policymakers realized that thousands of households were eligible for food assistance after paying for utilities, housing, child care and medical care – basic needs expenses that are part of the calculation for SNAP eligibility.

“By targeting people who gain a modest increase in earnings, this provision of the House farm bill would punish struggling working families just as they are getting back on their feet,” said Claire Lane, Director of the Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition. “It would make it harder for thousands of low-income working families to put food on the table for their kids, even as they struggle to afford expenses like child care and rent.”

The proposal to restrict categorical eligibility is included in the 2018 farm bill that recently passed the House Agriculture Committee. It would create what’s known as a “benefit cliff,” meaning that a family close to the income threshold that accepts a small wage increase or starts logging more hours at their job would lose all its SNAP benefits if that pushes their earnings above the federal threshold.

“This proposal punishes people for working harder. It stands in direct contrast to the House Agriculture Committee Chairman’s stated goal of encouraging work through the farm bill,” said Christina Wong, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy for Northwest Harvest.

The proposal is one of several cuts and changes to SNAP in the House farm bill that, together, would take away or cut benefits for more than one million households – and two million people – nationwide.

“SNAP helps nearly 930,000 people across Washington cover the costs of food, and this proposed farm bill would only increase hunger and food insecurity by making it more difficult for families to afford a basic diet. We need a farm bill that supports Washingtonians and strengthens SNAP, not weakens it,” added Wong.

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About Northwest Harvest
Northwest Harvest is Washington’s leading hunger relief agency – supporting a statewide network of 375 food banks, meal programs, and high-need schools. Focused on improving equity in our food system, Northwest Harvest believes everyone in Washington should have consistent access to nutritious food that feeds the body, mind, and spirit. In addition to making sure those who suffer from hunger are being fed, Northwest Harvest aims to shift public opinion, as well as impact institutional policies and societal practices that perpetuate hunger, poverty, and disparities in our state.

About Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition
The Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition brings the voices of hungry Washington families to the ears of our policy makers to insure that public policy leads our response to hunger in our state. Over the years, the Coalition has successfully advocated for strategic policy and state appropriations to maximize federal nutrition programs, reinforce our community-based emergency food assistance system and link local farmers with the needs of the hungry.