

# **Northeast Regional Anti-Hunger Network**

## *Statement on Food Stamp Reauthorization*

February 2007

Hunger remains a serious problem in our country. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that in 2004, 38 million Americans, including almost 14 million children, did not have access to enough food to meet their basic needs. The Food Stamp Program remains our nation's best response to hunger. By providing a nutritional safety net, the program ensures that hungry households and those on the edge of hunger are able to receive help.

It is essential that this defense against hunger remain an entitlement program, with a strong, independent identity from other benefit programs.

Through the reauthorization process, we seek to build on the progress made in the 2002 Farm Bill. We support a strengthened Food Stamp Program that improves benefits and removes barriers to access.

### **I. Improve Benefits**

The Food Stamp Program should ensure that low-income individuals can purchase the food they need to stay healthy.

→ **Increase adequacy of all benefit levels.** The Thrifty Food Plan should be replaced with USDA's Moderate or Low Cost Plan which better reflect current market basket values and enable recipients to meet USDA's nutritional standards.

→ **Restore eligibility to documented immigrants.** Remove the 5 year waiting period for otherwise qualified individuals.

→ **Raise the minimum benefit level and index it to inflation.** Increase the current \$10 minimum to \$40.

→ **Increase the asset limit and simplify asset tests.** Institute a \$5000 resource limit for all households, and exempt all retirement accounts, education savings accounts and Earned Income Tax Credits.

→ **Remove the excess shelter cap.** Allow households who spend more than half of their income to pay for housing and utilities to deduct the full amount of these excess shelter costs from their income.

→ **Extend transitional benefits eligibility.** Currently, households leaving TANF receive transitional food stamps for only 5 months.

## **II. Remove Barriers to Access**

No other federal nutrition program requires as much documentation and reporting as the Food Stamp Program. We seek to improve access to food stamps for eligible individuals and families by streamlining administration of the program. This would improve both efficiency and participation.

→ **Simplify the application process and streamline documentation requirements, including:**

- **Provide for demonstration pilots to further simplify existing application and calculation procedures.**
- **Make sure every state has a Combined Application Project (CAP).** CAPs increase food stamp enrollment of elderly and disabled SSI recipients.
- **Allow states to use a standard medical deduction for elderly and disabled households,** as an alternative to verifying actual medical costs.
- **Eliminate the interview requirement at recertification.**

→ **Enhance funding to states for program administration.** Include monies to assist states to develop or improve technology.

→ **Eliminate special rules for:**

- **non-citizens** (eliminate sponsor deeming & liability);
- **able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) and**
- **those who have been convicted of a drug-related felony.**

→ **Create additional federal support for outreach.**

→ **Continue performance bonus awards to states achieving the greatest improvements in program access.**