



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.

July 30, 2018

The Honorable Michael Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition
& Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition
& Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Chairman Roberts, and Ranking Member Stabenow:

As you begin conference committee negotiations to reconcile the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R. 2) and the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (S. 3402), National Skills Coalition – a broad-based coalition of business leaders, union affiliates, education and training providers, community-based organizations, and public workforce agencies advocating for policies that invest in the skills of U.S. workers - strongly urges you to reject the proposed changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the SNAP Employment & Training Program (SNAP E&T) under the House bill, and instead adopt the more sensible reauthorization approach under the Senate bill.

National Skills Coalition has long championed the role of SNAP E&T as a key strategy for helping low-income workers gain the skills and credentials they need to compete in today's economy. With as many as 80 percent of all jobs in today's labor market requiring some form of postsecondary education and training – and with as many as half of all long-term SNAP recipients having educational attainment below the high school level – it is critically important to invest in high quality education and training strategies that allow SNAP participants to obtain family-supporting jobs.

The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorization recognized the vital role of skills in improving the career opportunities for SNAP participants, restoring funding for state E&T formula grants to historic levels and making new investments in state pilot programs intended to support innovative approaches to education and training for low-income workers. The 2014 law also largely maintained SNAP eligibility requirements relating to work and work registration – including allowing states to operate E&T programs on a voluntary basis - and retained flexible funding to reimburse states and other stakeholders for certain costs relating to the administration of training programs. These modest but important improvements garnered strong bipartisan support on Capitol Hill and have driven the expansion of state SNAP E&T efforts over the past four years.

H.R. 2 rejects the incremental approach of the 2014 law in favor of sweeping eligibility changes to the SNAP program, significantly expanding work requirements for SNAP participants and leading to the loss of critical nutrition assistance of as many as 1.2 million people in an average month by the year 2028. The House bill seeks to balance these changes through new investments in SNAP E&T state formula grants, but in doing so it imposes substantial new administrative burdens on states and provides an unrealistic two-year implementation process for incorporating these new requirements. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that states would not be able to offer training to all eligible recipients by the 2021 deadline set by the House bill, and in fact would likely be able to meet the needs of only 80 percent of eligible recipients by 2028. While we recognize that the House bill is intended to be ambitious – and we would support increased investments in state formula grants for SNAP E&T – we cannot support the expansion of ineffective and cumbersome work requirements as proposed by the House bill: setting both states and SNAP participants up to fail is simply not good policy.

The Senate bill takes a more measured approach to SNAP E&T. Rather than expanding work requirements, the Senate bill expands investments in skills through additional pilot funding to support state and local innovations and provides states with new training options to help SNAP participants succeed in the labor market. Importantly, the Senate bill does not make dramatic changes to the underlying structure of the SNAP E&T program and individual eligibility, providing states with consistency as they seek to build out their skills investments and make high quality education and training available to more SNAP participants and other low-income workers. With more states than ever taking advantage of the flexibility under current law – preliminary data suggests that more than 40 states are now drawing down SNAP E&T reimbursements for program administration, up from just over 30 states in Fiscal Year 2016 – it is critical that Congress not disrupt the growing momentum for skills training through dramatic and unnecessary changes to benefit eligibility.

National Skills Coalition strongly supports efforts to help SNAP participants succeed in the workforce, and we believe that the proposed amendments in the Senate bill are the right path to achieving this goal. Again, we urge you to adopt the Senate approach to SNAP and SNAP E&T as part of broader Farm Bill reauthorization efforts, and we look forward to working with Congress and other stakeholders to successfully implement these proposed improvements to SNAP E&T.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kermit Kaleba". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

Kermit Kaleba
Federal Policy Director