May 2, 2024

The Honorable Jim Costa
Member, House Agriculture Committee
2081 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Subject: 2024 Farm Bill—Eliminating Barriers to SNAP for Postsecondary Students

Dear Congressman Costa:

On behalf of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU), I urge you to address the urgent crisis of food insecurity among students in higher education in the Farm Bill. It is essential for Congress to overhaul the complex eligibility rules in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (also known as CalFresh in California) that undermine federal and state investments in higher education and workforce development and make it harder for college and university students to access the benefits.

AICCU is the organizational voice for 90 nonprofit, WASC-accredited higher education institutions in California. Our membership is diverse, ranging from liberal arts colleges to large research institutions, art and design colleges to faith-based universities, including Fresno Pacific University in your district. In total, AICCU member colleges and universities educate nearly 350,000 students. Of the nearly 184,000 undergraduate students, over 46,000 receive the Pell Grant, nearly 11,000 receive Federal Work-Study, and nearly 27,000 receive the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunities Grant. Please refer to the AICCU 2024 Federal Impact report for more information about the students served in the independent higher education sector.

As Congress works to reauthorize the Farm Bill, we urge you to remove restrictions in SNAP that create barriers for postsecondary students to access food assistance:

- Streamline SNAP eligibility by allowing enrollment in higher education to satisfy activity and participation requirements, and putting students with low incomes on equal footing with other individuals who are eligible for SNAP. Principally, Congress should incorporate the Enhancing Access to SNAP (EATS) Act into the Farm Bill to remove the harmful “work-for-food” requirements on students.

- Reinstitute provisions providing access to SNAP for students who do not have the financial means to contribute out-of-pocket to higher education (including students with a Student Aid Index of less than or equal to 0) and those who are eligible for federal or state work-study to qualify for food assistance without being subjected to additional activity and participation requirements.

- Expand and simplify student exemptions to include populations of students at high risk of food insecurity who meet the income eligibility thresholds, including students with dependent children; students who act as family caregivers; Pell Grant recipients; students and families enrolled in other public benefit programs; and students considered to be financially independent for purposes of federal student aid, including veterans and servicemembers, former foster youth, and students experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
To improve outreach, awareness, and enrollment, Congress should:

- Remove administrative burdens such as the mandatory interview requirement that impedes access to SNAP by students, leverage student data from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to identify potentially eligible students, streamline or pre-qualify SNAP enrollment, and modernize the benefit application and delivery processes.

- Clarify and facilitate the ability of institutions of higher education to accept SNAP on campus, including on-campus stores that sell grocery items, and by allowing more students to use SNAP for prepared meals on campus, particularly at institutions serving a high population of students with lower incomes.

- Require and provide funding for proactive outreach, coordination, and data-sharing among and between the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Education, Internal Revenue Service, state SNAP agencies, and institutions of higher education to facilitate enrollment of potentially eligible students into SNAP.

- Require state SNAP agencies to collect and disaggregate data on the number of SNAP recipients that are currently enrolled in higher education and annually report that data to USDA, given the current lack of state or national data on student participation in SNAP.

Streamlining access and reducing bureaucratic barriers to food assistance for students is a sound and worthy investment that promotes food security, supports educational attainment, better aligns SNAP with federal financial aid and other public benefit programs. The Farm Bill represents a significant bipartisan opportunity to address hunger and food insecurity for students and their families. We look forward to working with you on these critical efforts. If you have questions, please contact Thomas Vu, Vice President for Policy, at thomas.vu@aiccu.edu.

Sincerely,

Kristen F. Soares