



November 14, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Democratic Leader
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin Brady
Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means
1102 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Neal
Ranking Member, Committee on Ways and Means
1139E Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Leader Pelosi, Chairman Brady, and Ranking Member Neal:

I write to share Feeding America's concerns about the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (H.R. 1) and its impact on the individuals and families facing hunger in every community across our country. Without changes to address the concerns outlined below, we are unable to support this legislation.

According to our recently-released *Map the Meal Gap 2017* report, 1 in 8 individuals in the United States, and 1 in 6 children, are food insecure. All told, 42 million people live in households without consistent access to adequate food, and the need among those who are food insecure continues to rise. Feeding America and our network of 200 food banks and 60,000 community agencies provide more than 4 billion pounds of food annually to more than 46 million people, including 12 million children and 7 million seniors.

As the nation's largest private response to domestic hunger, and the country's third largest charitable organization, Feeding America works to advance public policies that support food insecure individuals and families and that expand the resources necessary for them to access nutritious food. Given that the aggregate annual food budget shortfall for all food insecure individuals in the United States now stands at more than \$22.25 billion, our highest priority is protecting the federal nutrition programs that help these families access the resources and nutrition needed to succeed.

At the same time, a large percentage of individuals, including children, who struggle with hunger fall outside the public safety net, underscoring the profound need for private food assistance. In 2015, more than a quarter of food insecure individuals nationwide lived in households that earned too much to qualify for most federal nutrition assistance programs. For these working families, the generosity of individuals and corporations makes possible vital food assistance that might not otherwise be available.

Taking into consideration both our work and our public policy priorities, Feeding America has evaluated the impact of H.R. 1 on the individuals and families served by our network of food banks, as well as on both public and private nutrition assistance efforts. We have determined that, regrettably, the legislation would provide little direct benefit to food insecure individuals in the United States, and at the same time would undermine efforts to assist those who struggle with adequate access to food.

Legislation as far-reaching and complex as H.R. 1 necessarily has many constituencies, and we recognize the important tradeoffs required to advance different objectives. Unfortunately, the bill does not prioritize assisting those taxpayers who are most at risk of being food insecure, and as a result they are not among the primary beneficiaries of the bill's nearly \$6 trillion in tax reductions. On the whole, the legislation provides little direct, tangible benefit to the individuals and families served by Feeding America.

At the same time, a number of the measure's revenue raising proposals would reduce or eliminate current provisions that directly benefit many lower-income individuals and underserved communities. These changes include the elimination of the personal exemption, the repeal of numerous income-limited education benefits, and the loss of tax credits that encourage the hiring of SNAP and TANF recipients and that stimulate investment in low-income urban neighborhoods and rural communities.

Additionally, we are concerned that the increased deficits created by the legislation, and the resulting additional debt that must be financed, will together place downward pressure on federal spending in both the short and long term. It has been our experience that such pressure results in disproportionate cuts to programs intended to help those most in need.

Indeed, the fiscal year House 2018 Budget Resolution mandated \$10 billion in spending reductions from the Agriculture Committee, with the expectation those cuts were to come from the SNAP program. The resolution also recommended structural changes to the program that would have resulted in a further reduction of \$150 billion over ten years. At a time when the amount needed to feed our hungry neighbors continues to rise, we should not undermine federal nutrition assistance programs.

Finally, the bill's changes to the standard deduction and the availability of itemized deductions would for tens of millions of taxpayers effectively eliminate the deduction for charitable contributions, a provision in the tax code that has for more than a century encouraged gifts to charity. The Joint Committee on Taxation has concluded that the number of taxpayers who claim a charitable deduction would drop by more than 30 million, and that the amount claimed would decline by nearly \$95 billion. Earlier this year, an Indiana University study found that changes similar to those in H.R. 1 could cause annual charitable giving to decline by approximately \$10 billion.

Repealing the federal estate tax would remove another of the tax code's giving incentives, with the Congressional Budget Office previously estimating that repeal of the tax could cause charitable giving to decline by as much as 11 percent. This would have translated to a loss of more than \$30 billion in revenue for charities last year. The loss of these giving incentives would have a devastating effect on a wide range of charitable programs and services delivered in communities across the country, including those that provide much-needed food assistance to hungry individuals and families.

As tax reform deliberations began, Feeding America was hopeful that the process would result in legislation that eased the burdens on lower-income working families, continued to encourage Americans to give generously to charity, and ensured the government had the resources necessary to meet our collective obligations to provide for the health and well-being of our neighbors and our communities.

Unfortunately, in our view H.R. 1 does not generally prioritize support for those individuals and families most at risk of facing hunger, does not support short- and long-term funding for federal nutrition assistance programs, and does not preserve current levels of giving to charitable organizations. Given these concerns, Feeding America cannot support H.R. 1 as currently written.

We know it is early in the process, and urge you to revisit the legislation and its impact on the people we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Aviv". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Diana Aviv
President and CEO
Feeding America