Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 13, 2011

The Honorable James E. Clyburn
Member of Congress
2135 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Clyburn,

As the Select Committee on Deficit Reduction begins to meet and consider ways to achieve the federal deficit goals set out in the Budget Control Act, we write to request that the Committee's decisions protect critical programs for low-income families – particularly our nation's anti-hunger programs. Specifically, we respectfully ask that the Committee reject policy choices that would risk increasing hunger or poverty in America.

Last December, President Obama's bipartisan National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, headed by Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson, developed deficit reduction recommendations to reduce the federal deficit that adhered to a guiding principle of not increasing poverty or income inequality. The Commission's final recommendations would reduce the deficit by $4 trillion over 10 years, without any cuts to our nation's critical non-health safety net entitlement programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the child nutrition programs.

Furthermore, this summer, the Senate's bipartisan "Gang of Six" deficit reduction plan also reduced the deficit by $4 trillion over ten years without cuts to the core low-income entitlement programs. In fact, this plan explicitly precluded the Agriculture Committee from reducing SNAP in meeting its target for deficit reduction.

These plans demonstrate that major deficit reduction can be achieved in a bipartisan manner and without harming vulnerable families by cutting key nutrition and other critical low-income assistance programs. In fact, every major deficit reduction package since 1985 has exempted low-income entitlement programs from cuts, and some of these packages have even contained provisions that *reduced* poverty and inequality.

As you know, an automatic sequester will be enacted should an agreement on at least $1.2 trillion in deficit reduction not be reached. The Budget Control Act spells out which programs are subject to the sequester and which programs will be excluded from any across-the-board cuts. We are relieved that all low-income entitlement programs, including the nutrition programs, will be excluded from any sequester, although we are disappointed that several critical discretionary anti-hunger programs are exposed. Such a sequester – in addition to the already

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planned reductions in overall discretionary spending – would likely result in negative consequences for needy families.

We recognize that achieving at least $1.2 trillion in deficit reduction is not an easy task. It is clear, however, that these and other safety net programs have been protected from the across-the-board cuts because both Republicans and Democrats believe that low-income families should not be harmed further by deficit reduction. We believe these criteria should be applied to your negotiations as well.

Protecting our nation's most vulnerable has never been more important. Our economy is fragile and has not yet fully recovered from the recent downturn. Millions of individuals and families continue to struggle with hunger and poverty. According to the Census Bureau, 46.2 million people lived in poverty in 2010, an increase of 2.6 million over 2009. Most experts expect that poverty figures will be even higher for 2011 and may take several years to improve, given the sustained high rates of unemployment. Despite these increases in poverty, we did not experience similar rises in hunger and food insecurity from 2008 to 2010. While overall hunger has been at unacceptable levels for far too long, we attribute the stable rates of food insecurity during a period of rising poverty to the important investments made through ARRA in SNAP and other programs. Those critical investments helped to buffer some of the negative impacts of the recession.

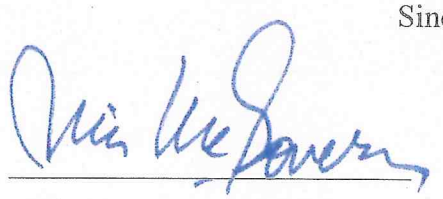
A claim that our nation has only a spending problem does not properly address the root causes of the deficit. And, a failure to include substantial revenues will place virtually the entire burden of deficit reduction on ordinary Americans, worsening poverty and inequality and making it even harder for struggling families to make ends meet.

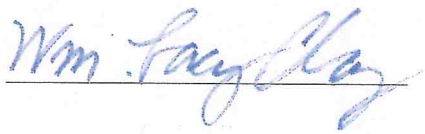
The inclusion of revenues is critical if we are to truly reduce our deficit without causing harm to vulnerable Americans. We strongly support the inclusion of revenues in any deal extending the debt limit.

Cutting the safety net, whether for deficit reduction or for other reasons, harms our economy and those who rely on these programs to help feed their families during difficult economic times. Most importantly, deficit reduction should not result in increased hunger and poverty; our first goal should be to do no harm. Any proposal to reduce the deficit must protect our most vulnerable families from hunger and poverty.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,





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