

Dear Senator/Representative _____

On behalf of the Durham County Board of Commissioners, we write to express our unequivocal support for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and to urge you to reject any proposals that would weaken or cut this essential benefit.

Food insecurity is a critical issue in Durham County. In 2022, nearly 12% of participants in Durham's Community Health Assessment Survey responded that they skipped or cut the size of their meals because they did not have enough money to buy food. In recent months, our food pantry staff have reported a rapid increase in food insecurity and need for services, with most pantries seeing a 20-30% increase in regular clients.

SNAP provides critical food benefits to help more than 35,000 Durham County residents afford nutritious food. Forty-six percent of these residents are under 18 years of age and nearly 10% are over 65 years old. Food insecurity and the need for SNAP is even greater in NC's rural communities, with one in six households participating in the program. Additionally, 80% of households that receive SNAP in North Carolina include someone who is working.

While SNAP is a lean program, with benefits averaging about \$5.70 per person per day, it has additional food security benefits for our families. Children who are enrolled in SNAP are automatically qualified for free meals in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs. This reduces the burden of paperwork for our school staff and families. The meals help increase student performance and attendance.

Additionally, SNAP saves North Carolina money in Medicaid costs. A recent NC study showed that older adult participation in SNAP is associated with fewer hospital and long-term care admission, and emergency department visits, with an estimated Medicaid cost-savings of \$2,360 per person annually.

An investment in SNAP is an investment in our economy. Every \$1 invested in SNAP benefits generates between \$1.50 and \$1.80 for local economies. According to the National Grocers Association, SNAP was responsible for 7,772 jobs across grocery and supporting industries, generating \$218 million in wages and driving total output of \$522 million in North Carolina. SNAP is also accepted at over 50 farmers' markets throughout the state. Four of these are located in Durham where SNAP customers spend over \$70,000 a year.

Any cut to the SNAP program will have a negative rippling effect across Durham County and North Carolina. SNAP cuts would mean people have less to spend at NC's 9,200 SNAP retailers, which would hurt farmers, the food distribution pipeline, and local economies, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, SNAP cuts put more pressure on NC supermarkets and superstores, especially in rural counties, making it harder for them to keep doors open and continue being a reliable source of food and employment.

SNAP cuts would send more people to food pantries. For every meal a food pantry provides, SNAP benefits supply nine. Food pantries are already under significant pressure from rising grocery prices, increased clients and demand, and decrease in supplies and donations due to federal cuts to Local Farm Produce Assistance Program. Furthermore, individual donations

have decreased and the increased needs in Western North Carolina due to the aftermath of Hurricane Helene have diverted food from other areas of the state. Many of the pantries in Durham have only 6 months of funding until they will need to shut their doors due to these strains. Our emergency food system cannot endure any cuts to the SNAP program.

SNAP helps North Carolina residents thrive, especially our children and seniors, supports our local economy and is vital for North Carolina farmers. As local elected leaders, and as residents of the great state of North Carolina, we urge you to strengthen the SNAP program and oppose any efforts to reduce its reach or effectiveness.

Sincerely,

Durham County Board of Commissioners