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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

January 18, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I am writing regarding a letter submitted to your department's Food and Nutrition Service on December 28, 2011 by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. According to recent news reports, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has requested permission from your office to reinstate the asset test for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, previously known as the federal food stamp program.

Please accept this letter as my formal request, on behalf of the entire Pennsylvania House Democratic Caucus, that you deny the request of Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett's Department of Public Welfare to reinstate the asset test for SNAP. This change would limit SNAP eligibility to Pennsylvania households with a maximum of \$2,000 in assets and \$3,250 for households with individuals who are age 60 or older or are disabled. If the USDA approves this request, Pennsylvania will have the most restrictive SNAP eligibility standards in the nation.

Such narrow restrictions would take an enormous human toll on Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens, cost Pennsylvania's taxpayers more money and have a devastating impact on Pennsylvania's economy.

Despite the Corbett Administration's assertions that reinstating the asset test will aid in Pennsylvania's efforts to root out "fraud, waste and abuse," the fact is that few such problems exist with SNAP in Pennsylvania. In fact, statistics show that Pennsylvania's fraud rate in the program is among the lowest in the nation – a mere one-tenth of 1 percent.

In truth, reinstating the asset test will do nothing but hurt tens of thousands of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens and their families, many of whom are already living on the edge and barely able to make ends meet.

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If your agency approves the Corbett Administration's request, it will hurt seniors who are saving money for medical emergencies, children whose parents recently lost their jobs because of the historic economic recession, and thousands of middle-class families across eastern and central Pennsylvania whose lives were turned upside down by the disastrous flooding last fall. Worst of all, an asset test would force Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens and their families deeper into poverty. It is simply counterproductive to the common goal of providing a safety net for the working poor so they can save money, build assets and lift themselves out of poverty.

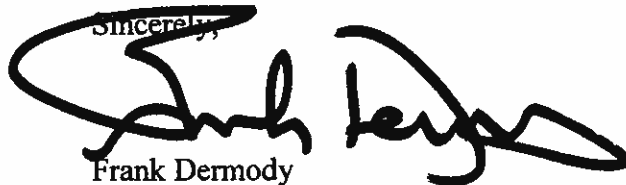
Beyond the human toll this proposal would have on tens of thousands of Pennsylvanians and their families, it would also have a devastating impact on Pennsylvania's economy. Adding an asset test would cost Pennsylvania \$85 million in lost federal benefits, while simultaneously forcing the state to dedicate more staff time to conduct the asset testing – at greater cost to Pennsylvania taxpayers. In addition, the loss of \$85 million in federal benefits would immediately have an impact on the local and state economies, as grocery stores, farmers' markets and convenience stores would see a significant drop in sales.

As you well know, statistics show that every dollar in SNAP benefits generates \$1.73 in economic activity. Using those figures, reinstating an asset test for SNAP would cost Pennsylvania more than \$147 million in lost economic activity.

This is an attack on working families, an attack on children, an attack on women, an attack on seniors, an attack on individuals with disabilities, and an attack on the most vulnerable among us. It's wrong-headed and short-sighted. And it's counterproductive to President Obama's efforts to lift our nation – and our citizens – out of these difficult economic circumstances.

For these reasons, I urge you to deny the Corbett Administration's request to change Pennsylvania's SNAP eligibility standards by reinstating an asset test. Thank for your time and consideration in this request. Please contact me if you would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Dermody". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "F" and "D".

Frank Dermody  
Democratic Leader  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

cc: Kevin Concannon, USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services  
Audrey Rowe, USDA Administrator for the Food and Nutrition Service