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## Senators Harris, Gillibrand, and Sanders Introduce Alma Adams' SNAP Bill in the Senate

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To: Steve Johnston



## Senators Harris, Gillibrand, and Sanders Introduce Alma Adams' SNAP Bill in the Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senators Kamala D. Harris (D-CA) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), along with Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), on Thursday announced the introduction of the *Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2020*, legislation that expands and strengthens Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for vulnerable community members that are struggling to make ends meet. With food banks experiencing skyrocketing demand across the country, the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically increased the need for SNAP to combat food insecurity.

This effort builds off of work done by **Congresswoman Alma Adams** in the House. Adams originally introduced the *Closing the Meal Gap Act in 2017*, and again in 2019. The provisions in the House version of the *Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2020* were previously endorsed by Feeding America and the Food Research and Action Center. Adams' bill currently has 115 cosponsors in the House.

“Before COVID-19, 38 million Americans depended on SNAP for their meals. Now, it’s even clearer that SNAP benefits are simply not generous enough to provide the help people need,” **said Congresswoman Adams**. “The Closing the Meal Gap Act will address this issue by strengthening the SNAP program for millions of people affected by COVID-19 as well as older Americans, people with disabilities, children, struggling parents, students, unemployed and underemployed people, and veterans. I’m grateful for the leadership of Senators Harris and Gillibrand in the Senate and hopeful that together we can pass this bill and take another big step towards ending hunger in America.”

“We are in the midst of a historic economic crisis – people are hurting. They are struggling to put food on the table, and existing nutrition benefits don’t get people through the end of the month,” **said Senator Harris**. “Folks are looking to Congress to take immediate action to help them make ends meet. I’m proud to introduce the Closing the Meal Gap Act because we need to give people the resources they need to afford food during tough times. No one in America should ever go hungry, especially during a public health crisis.”

“The SNAP program provides a critical lifeline for food insecure families, but during this unprecedented crisis, the program needs more support than ever to meet the needs of every SNAP recipient,” **said Senator Gillibrand**. “Not only must SNAP provide more benefits, but barriers to eligibility should also be limited in order to reach more families. I’m proud to introduce this legislation with Senator Harris and lead the fight to keep food on the table throughout this pandemic and beyond.”

“At a time when the coronavirus pandemic is threatening millions of lives across the country and causing huge spikes in unemployment, we need to make sure our safety net is stronger than ever. That means making sure all Americans, including in our

territories, have the food they need to feed their families,” **said Senator Sanders.**

The Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2020 is endorsed by California Association of Food Banks, Western Center on Law and Poverty, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, Hunger Free America, Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico, Public Interest Law Project, California Coalition of Welfare Rights Organizations, California Partnership, Central California Food Bank, Ceres Community Project, Communities Actively Living Independent & Free, County Welfare Directors Association of California, Food Bank of Santa Barbara County, Food for People, Inc., FOOD Share of Venture County, Hunger Action Los Angeles, Jewish Family Service LA, Mercy Brown Bag, Orange County Food Bank, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank, Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County, Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, California Alternative Payment Program Association, California Food Policy Advocates, CAPP Children's Foundation, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, End Child Poverty CA/The GRACE Institute, Feeding San Diego, Friends of the Earth, Kidango, San Diego Food Bank, San Francisco Senior and Disability Action, Yolo Food Bank, East Bay Community Law Center, Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council, Ecology Center, Food Bank of Contra Costa & Solano Counties, Meals on Wheels California, Sacramento Food Bank, Sacramento Food Policy Council, SAGE, San Diego Food Systems Alliance, Westside Food Bank, New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, National Council on Aging, Alameda County Food Bank, Lutheran Office of Public Policy, National Association of Social Workers, National Association of Social Workers - California Chapter, Redwood Empire Food Bank, San Diego Hunger Coalition, Slow Food California, and the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.

“SNAP was one of the first programs to respond to the pandemic with timely and quick resources to prevent hunger among families losing earnings, school meals and congregate senior meals,” said Jessica Bartholow of the Western Center on Law and Poverty. “Unfortunately, it hasn’t been as responsive as it could have been had the benefit been right-sized. The Close the Meal Gap will ready SNAP to better meet the need and prevent hunger during the current public health crises and beyond and we are honored to be an original endorser of the Act.”

“We are thrilled that Senator Harris has introduced the Closing the Meal Gap Act to strengthen SNAP, our nation’s best defense against hunger,” said Andrew Cheyne, director of government affairs at the California Association of Food Banks. “Even before this pandemic, our network saw first-hand the necessity of SNAP, the program delivers nine meals for every one meal distributed through food banks. Moreover, while SNAP is essential to the health and wellbeing of our community-members, it also crucial to the local economy by creating jobs and making sure local businesses have customers. Especially during this unprecedented crisis, we need the critical investments this important legislation would provide to fight hunger and deliver critical economic stimulus.”

“Given that we are now facing the worst U.S. hunger crisis in modern history, it’s absolutely vital to get extra food help to the tens of millions of Americans who rely on SNAP to help fill their grocery carts. Such a SNAP boost would dwarf the food aid that charities are able to provide, and would also help keep food stores and farmers in business. I thank Senators Gillibrand and Harris for their compassionate and common-sense leadership on this,” said Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has made it all too clear that there are gaping holes in our country’s nutrition safety net, and while others have failed to act, Senators Harris and Gillibrand have shown a real commitment to meeting the critical needs of all Americans,” said Abby J. Leibman, President & CEO of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. “We have known for years that SNAP benefits do not provide enough support for individuals and families who struggle with hunger. Now, more than ever, we must rectify this in a way that stimulates the economy and enables all those who need SNAP — including veterans, college students, Native Americans, and people in rural and remote communities — to put food on the table.”

#### **The Closing the Meal Gap Act of 2020:**

- **Increases Benefits. Increases the baseline for SNAP benefits by approximately 30%. This better aligns with how household needs, and allows for a more nutritional diet.**
- **Eliminates Eligibility Limits & Unrealistic Barriers. Eliminates time limits for people struggling to find work from receiving SNAP benefits.**

- **Expands Benefits For Territories. Stops discrimination against those who live and work in U.S. territories by transitioning them to SNAP and treating them as if they were states.**

**A one-pager on the bill can be found [here](#).**

**Bill text can be found [here](#).**

**Rep. Adams' House version can be found [here](#).**

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