

December 6, 2005

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500
Via Email and Facsimile

Dear Mr. President,

It is with great urgency that we ask for your leadership in vocally opposing food stamp cuts, especially those arbitrarily targeting immigrants. The proposed cuts now pending in a House/Senate conference committee on the budget reconciliation bills would undo the initiative that you championed in 2002, one that is providing vital nutrition assistance to many hard working, long-time legal resident families. These families are relying on your strong opposition to a provision of the House budget bill (H.R. 4241) that would single out legal immigrants for harm.

The House roll-back in immigrant eligibility for food stamps would also shift costs to states and entail burdensome administrative changes. The 70,000 legal immigrants cut from federal food stamps will have dire needs that states will be challenged to fulfill. If the cuts are enacted, states would face increased administrative burdens as they are forced to reprogram computers, retrain caseworkers, and reeducate clients about new rules inconsistent with other programs they administer.

In 1996, legal immigrants were subjected to what amounted to a lifetime ban from food stamps, and studies showed a spike in hunger among immigrant families, many of which include US citizen children. A five-year waiting period was enacted in the 2002 Farm Bill after you proposed that provision in your FY 2003 Budget and worked hard for its adoption. Restoring food stamp eligibility for long-term legal immigrants enjoyed widespread bipartisan support in Congress and among groups representing state and local officials, as well as advocates from anti-hunger, immigrant and faith-based organizations. When you signed the 2002 Farm Bill, you lauded the provision as compassionate, explaining it in terms that resonated broadly: "It means that you can have a head of a family who's been working hard, been here for five years, been a part of our economy, been legally working. And that person falls on hard times, our government should help them with food stamps."

Since 2002, USDA's Food and Nutrition Services has undertaken several initiatives aimed at welcoming immigrants back onto the Food Stamp Program, noting that "increased participation among newly eligible immigrants is a Bush Administration priority." Your personal leadership on this issue did not go unnoticed within immigrant communities. Your Administration's efforts have made a discernable difference. Although immigrants are still more likely than citizens to experience hunger and food insecurity, their situation is improving, thanks in large part to the critical nutritional support that more immigrant families are receiving from food stamps.

During Thanksgiving and throughout the holiday season, families across the country celebrate togetherness with an abundance of food made possible by America's agricultural workers, three quarters of whom are immigrants. Basic human decency requires that these workers who feed the nation's families have enough food to make sure that their own families do not suffer from

hunger. If the House proposal becomes law, an estimated 70,000 legal immigrants will lose food stamps. Ironically, 70,000 is also the approximate number of legal immigrants serving in the armed forces, many of them putting their lives on the line abroad while Congress considers these cuts at home.

Please don't let our nation renege on the important commitment made to nutrition assistance in the 2002 Farm Bill. We stand ready to work with you in maintaining the provisions you and a broad coalition won in 2002. Given the time pressures on budget negotiations, we ask for your immediate, explicit, and outspoken opposition to the pending legal immigrant food stamp cuts.

We would welcome a response to this letter by contacting: Jennifer Ng'andu, National Council of La Raza, 1126 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 776-1762; or Jonathan Blazer, National Immigration Law Center, 1101 14th St., NW, Suite 410, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 216-0261.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union
American Friends Service Committee
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Asian American Justice Center
Asian Pacific American Legal Center
Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Boat People SOS
California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative
Center for Community Change
Centro de Amistad, Inc.
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
Congreso de Latinos Unidos
Council of Latin Americans in Alaska for Special Services
Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM)
Farmworker Justice Fund, Inc.
Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center
Latino Leadership, Inc
League of United Latin American Citizens, National Office
Legal Momentum, Immigrant Women Program
Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigration Forum
New York Immigration Coalition
Servicios de la Raza, Inc.
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
United Migrant Opportunity Services, Inc.

cc: Mike Johanns, USDA Secretary
Eric Bost, USDA Under Secretary