

Policy Committee of the National Muslim COVID-19 Task Force



June 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
The Honorable John Cornyn
Majority Whip
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
The Honorable Dick Durbin
Minority Whip
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Letter to Support the SNAP Provisions of the HEROES Act

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Majority Whip Cornyn, Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Whip Durbin:

As COVID-19 spreads throughout the U.S., food insecurity is an increasingly difficult challenge for many Americans as they struggle to afford food and other basic needs. According to a 2019 USDA survey, approximately [37 million Americans struggled with hunger in the United States, including more than 11 million children](#). Additionally, according to the most recent [Feeding America report](#), 5.3 million seniors, or 7.3% of the senior population, were food insecure in 2018. With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, these issues are exacerbated and our emergency food assistance measures will not be able to address the immediate needs of this crisis. [As of an April 2020 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, the unemployment rate shot up from 4.4% to 14.7% in one month](#). Americans are, therefore, applying for unemployment and food assistance benefits in record numbers. For this reason, we call on the U.S. Senate to pass the food insecurity provisions in the HEROES Act (H.R. 6800) that were passed in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 15th in order to bolster the economy and improve financial security for the families, Congress vowed to serve.

Over the past few weeks, we have seen the toll that the global COVID-19 pandemic is having on our local communities. We now have more than [1.7 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States with more than 100,000 deaths](#). In addition to the loss of life and widespread illness, as mentioned earlier over 40 million Americans have lost employment or have been furloughed. The immediate financial implications associated with the economic fallout from this

pandemic are clear. Families across the country are struggling to meet basic needs. Families with low incomes, older adults, and communities of color are being hit particularly hard. American-Muslims comprise about [1.1% of the total U.S. population](#), and many American-Muslims live in cities hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as New York, Philadelphia, and Detroit. Financial concerns are especially prevalent among people employed in public-facing industries - such as supermarket stock and cashier staff, public transportation and ride-share drivers, sanitation workers, or construction workers - who have taken a hit during the pandemic, and Muslim New Yorkers make up a high percentage of these COVID-19 pandemic workers in the city, according to [Ahmed Mohamed, litigation director at the Council on American-Islamic Relations New York chapter \(CAIR-NY\)](#).

The immediate needs of these people are being addressed by the provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Act and the CARES Act; however, these measures are temporary and leave nearly 40 percent of SNAP participants without any emergency SNAP payments. There is a need for additional action to address the long-term impacts of the looming economic and health crisis.

We encourage Congress to support the **food insecurity provisions in the HEROES Act**. Through this Act, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – our country’s premier federal program for addressing food insecurity – will be strengthened. SNAP is a [proven tool to improve nutrition, health, and wellbeing](#) of families, and is ready to be deployed to help families gain/maintain access to food. Increases to SNAP during the Great Recession effectively [protected young children’s health](#) and improved family food security. We should mirror this historic policy action and pass the **HEROES Act** to increase the SNAP maximum (per meal) benefit by 15%, from approximately \$1.34 to \$1.55 per meal, and the minimum monthly SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30. This will provide much-needed assistance to families around the country that are struggling and suffering during this crisis. In addition, it is estimated that each dollar in federally funded SNAP benefits during a recession generates between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity, according to a recent [Food Research & Action Center study](#).

In the face of COVID-19, we must learn from the past and enact strong, evidence-based measures that respond to the realities of food-insecure households, participating families with children. Congress has taken the initial steps in the right direction and should continue to support measures that will provide the very basic needs of millions of Americans. To that end, we need to support and implement the elements of the **HEROES Act**, especially as it relates to food insecurity.

Sincerely,

Policy Committee Of National Muslim COVID-19 Taskforce:

American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)
Islamic Medical Association of North American (IMANA)
Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA)
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)

Other Signatories:

American Muslim Community Foundation

Caring Across Generations

Co-Operative Health

Every Child Matters

IMPACT

Imamia Medics International (IMI)

Islamic Society of North America

Justice in Aging

Muslim community center for Human services

NC Child

National Council of Jewish Women

National Patient Advocate Foundation

Poligon Education Fund

Sahaba Initiative

San Francisco AIDS Foundation

Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Zaman International