



**AMERICANS FOR
PROSPERITY**



September 6, 2018

The Honorable Patrick Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United State Senate
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States Senate
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Mike Conaway
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Colin C. Petersen
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Stabenow, Ranking Member Peterson, and members of the Farm Bill Conference Committee,

On behalf of our organizations and the millions of Americans we represent, we write to urge you to oppose any provisions in the final 2018 Farm Bill that create needless barriers for individuals reentering the community from incarceration. As you discuss how best to improve the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Employment and Training (E&T) program we implore you to specifically exclude provisions that restrict access to such assistance for the formerly incarcerated or those with criminal records. Such language unfairly punishes individuals who have already paid their debt to society, hurts their opportunities to lead productive lives post-release, and endangers the public in the process.

Each year, as many as 700,000 people are released from state and federal prisons, while more than 4.5 million people are under some form of community supervision, including parole and probation. Over 95 percent of state prison inmates will return to society, it's in our best interest to facilitate smooth transitions. Unfortunately, former prisoners already face a litany of obstacles: limited education and job skills, unstable housing options, and inaccessible medical care. These barriers partly explain why within three years, over two-thirds of former inmates are re-arrested. Former inmates have served their time. Hindering prisoners' ability to successfully re-enter society imposes an unjustly harsh punishment and erects artificial barriers to opportunity—all the while putting the public at risk by increasing the likelihood of recidivism.

Specifically, we urge you to exclude from the final bill the Holding Amendment, which would only continue to fuel this vicious cycle. Under current law, food assistance is already denied to individuals who have been found guilty of a violent crime if, upon release from prison, they violate parole or other terms of release. The Holding Amendment unfairly expands the scope of this current program restriction by imposing a lifetime ban on SNAP food assistance for individuals who have committed even a single crime, years or even decades previously. For the reasons mentioned above, such a policy will prevent returning citizens—who have appropriately paid their debts to society—from the same assistance finding success in their lives that they would otherwise qualify for.

As the conference committee continues its important work addressing our nation's farm policy and the various safety net programs that are involved, we remind you that we are a country of second chances. By rejecting barriers that keep those returning individuals from being full members of our society, you show that everyone is worthy of a second chance, regardless of past mistakes. We urge you to keep these principles in mind as you finalize the Farm Bill, and we look forward to continue working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Brent Gardner
Chief Government Affairs Officer
Americans for Prosperity

Mark Holden
Chairman
Freedom Partners