



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. James Comer (R-KY), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services Hearing:
“Examining the USDA’s Proposed Cuts to Free School Meals.”
October 16, 2019**

(As prepared for delivery)

“Education is a critical part of students’ success later in life and we know there is a correlation between food and healthy nutrition and the capacity of children to develop and learn. That is why federal funds have been used to provide free or reduced-price school meals to students for more than 70 years. With this in mind, I think it is also appropriate to recognize that this week marks the celebration of National School Lunch Week – a week dedicated to acknowledging the benefits of the National School Lunch Program and promoting access to nutritionally-balanced meals for students across the country.

Everyone in this room wants what is best for our nation’s school children. Unfortunately, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are intent on painting the picture that this administration is eager to put school-aged children in harm’s way; and this simply is not the case.

Today, you will hear Democrats wrongfully argue that the administration’s rule will deny school children access to free school meals. Their manipulation of the data may generate headlines, and it certainly advances the Democrats’ narrative, but it is far from the truth.

I’m afraid my colleagues have missed the point of USDA’s rule, and I’d like to take a moment to set the record straight.

All eligible children will continue to receive school meals. Let me repeat that. All eligible children will continue to receive school meals.

Currently, eligibility loopholes allow states to make families receiving minimal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits automatically eligible to participate in USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The purpose of TANF is to 'provide assistance to needy families to allow children to be cared for in their own homes, and end parents' dependence on government benefits through work promotion and marriage.'

Yet for years the federal government has allowed states to utilize federal loopholes to virtually eliminate the income and asset requirements for SNAP. The expanded eligibility has included families with incomes that far exceed eligibility requirements. In fact, I am sure we have all heard by now the story of a millionaire living in Minnesota was able to successfully enroll in the program. While this is likely not common, it is emblematic of a larger problem in these programs. So, the administration issued the rule we are discussing today, which is aimed at curtailing states from exploiting an eligibility loophole.

The benefits offered to those in need should actually reach those in need. We have a responsibility to diligently and responsibly allocate taxpayer dollars. Too many in Congress find it way too easy to spend hard-earned taxpayer dollars without promising accountability. That is an insult to every citizen who has entrusted us with their representation. Taxpayer dollars should be used effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with the law.

Committee Republicans believe that students who need free or reduced-priced lunches should be able to receive them. Period. Nothing in the proposed rule will change income eligibility thresholds in the child nutrition laws. USDA is taking comprehensive steps to ensure that benefits are provided effectively, efficiently, and with integrity to those most in need – an effort that everyone on this Committee should be able to support.”

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