



Voices for Alaska's Children and Youth

November 30, 2007

Senator Lisa Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510
FAX: (202) 224-5301

Dear Senator Murkowski:

We are writing to express our dismay that the Senate has not yet passed a Farm Bill this year, and we urge you to work toward a compromise and vote in favor of cloture should another cloture vote come before the Senate. As members of Voices for Alaska's Children and Youth (VACY), Alaska's new children's advocacy coalition, we are deeply concerned about the consequences of the Farm Bill's failure to pass for our state's most vulnerable citizens.

According to data recently published by America's Second Harvest, nearly 18 percent of Alaska's children are food insecure. Research has linked food insecurity and hunger during childhood with a host of negative physical, psychological, academic and behavioral outcomes, many of which can last a lifetime. The Food Stamp Program and other nutrition programs reauthorized in the Farm Bill are instrumental in fighting childhood hunger. More than 75 percent of food stamp benefits go to households with children, and the majority of food stamp households in Alaska are families with children. We are also mindful of the need among our low-income seniors, who comprise 11 percent of food stamp households in Alaska and the majority of Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) recipients.

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of food stamps and other nutrition programs has been limited by eroding benefit levels and outdated regulations. Food stamp benefits in Alaska currently average only \$4 per person per day. Some households, including many senior households, receive the shamefully low minimum benefit of \$10 per month. The child care deduction is capped at \$175 or \$200 per month, depending on the child's age, a completely unrealistic limit. The asset limit of \$2,000 per household has not been changed in decades, and under present law college and retirement savings are counted as assets—putting families in the unfortunate position of choosing between getting food stamps and saving for their retirement or their children's college education.

The Farm Bill currently stalled in the Senate would address all of these limitations: it would raise food stamp benefits by increasing the standard deduction, lift the cap on the child care deduction, and exclude college and retirement savings from the asset test. However, as long as the Farm Bill remains on hold, none of these badly needed changes will come to fruition.

We believe that no child or youth in Alaska should be hungry, and this Farm Bill would help achieve real progress in the fight against hunger in Alaska. We strongly urge the Senate to pass the Farm Bill without delay, and we ask you to help see this legislation through to its conclusion.

Sincerely,

Meghan Johnson
Chair, Voices for Alaska's Children and Youth
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Voices for Alaska's Children and Youth Steering Committee Members:

Debbie Bogart
Executive Director
Anchorage's Promise

John Patrick Luby
Advocacy Director
AARP Alaska

Shawn Powers
Advocacy Program Manager
Food Bank of Alaska

Tiffany Ryan
Executive Director
Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children

Lawrence D. Weiss
Executive Director
Alaska Center for Public Policy

Virgene Hanna

Melinda Myers

Sallye Werner



Voices for Alaska's Children and Youth

November 30, 2007

Senator Ted Stevens
522 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510
FAX: (202) 224-2354

Dear Senator Stevens:

We are writing to express our dismay that the Senate has not yet passed a Farm Bill this year, and we urge you to work toward a compromise and vote in favor of cloture should another cloture vote come before the Senate. As members of Voices for Alaska's Children and Youth (VACY), Alaska's new children's advocacy coalition, we are deeply concerned about the consequences of the Farm Bill's failure to pass for our state's most vulnerable citizens.

According to data recently published by America's Second Harvest, nearly 18 percent of Alaska's children are food insecure. Research has linked food insecurity and hunger during childhood with a host of negative physical, psychological, academic and behavioral outcomes, many of which can last a lifetime. The Food Stamp Program and other nutrition programs reauthorized in the Farm Bill are instrumental in fighting childhood hunger. More than 75 percent of food stamp benefits go to households with children, and the majority of food stamp households in Alaska are families with children. We are also mindful of the need among our low-income seniors, who comprise 11 percent of food stamp households in Alaska and the majority of Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) recipients.

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