

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 7, 2016

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Mr. Secretary:

We write regarding the United States Department of Agriculture's upcoming two-year pilot program to explore enabling SNAP participants to purchase groceries online. We strongly support USDA's actions to expand access to healthy, affordable food through the use of SNAP benefits online and we welcome the USDA's involvement in this important space.

With one of the most ethnically and economically diverse populations in the world, New York State provides the ideal environment for a pilot of this magnitude. New York City has the largest urban population in all of the United States, with Manhattan having the biggest dollar income gap of any county in the country. As such many New York City residents are unable to afford the cost of goods, limiting their ability to stretch their SNAP benefits. Moving outside the City, New York State has vast rural communities, many of which are located in food deserts that have been greatly impacted by the loss of the manufacturing sector. A large percentage of these residents have been forced into early retirement or find themselves with fewer employment opportunities, thus creating even more food insecure households. Our state has the landscape, diversity and access to technology that would allow the USDA to maximize the learning opportunities of this pilot.

Given New York's status as a national leader in technological innovation and anti-hunger efforts, along with its large population of SNAP beneficiaries, we strongly encourage the USDA to select New York for participation in the pilot. Also, so that selected states do not incur costs due to participation in the pilot, we ask that USDA contract directly with the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) processors for the EBT systems and infrastructure changes necessary to accommodate the pilot.

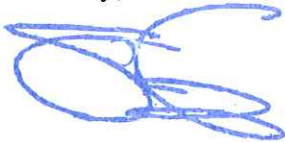
At a time when nearly 50 million Americans struggle to feed themselves, including millions of children, seniors, and veterans, it is imperative that the government take action to reduce food insecurity and provide consumers with greater choices. Expanding SNAP participants' ability to use their benefits in online purchasing can complement other essential parts of a strategy to end hunger, including important steps to improve the adequacy of SNAP benefit allotments and the program's reach. We understand that those who recognize online purchasing options as an

advance for SNAP consumers include Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. and advocates from Hunger Solutions New York, the Food Research and Action Center, Hunger Free America and others.

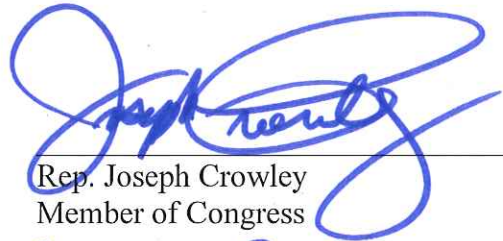
Because of the vital role that the upcoming pilot will play in informing future legislation and rule makings, we believe that it should take place in states well positioned to demonstrate the full potential of increased use of SNAP benefits online. The states selected should have the capacity to help demonstrate the impact of online SNAP usage on food pricing and access. When it comes to accomplishing that goal, we can think of no state more qualified than New York.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue, and to continuing to join together in the effort to reduce hunger in New York and across the country. Thank you for your attention to this letter and please do not hesitate to reach out if there's any way we can be of further assistance.

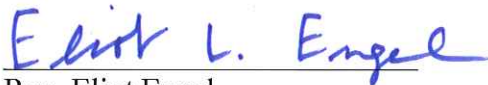
Sincerely,



Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



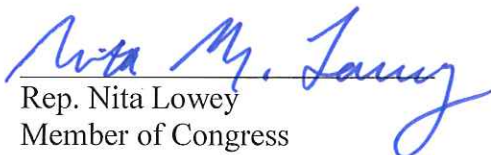
Rep. Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress



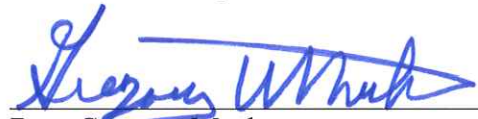
Rep. Eliot Engel
Member of Congress



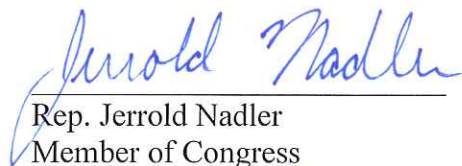
Rep. Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress



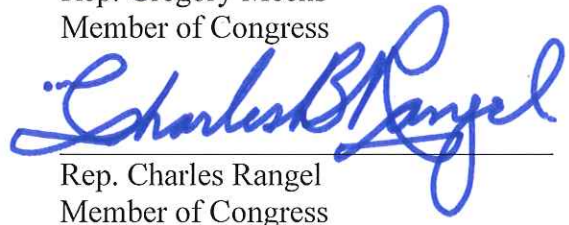
Rep. Nita Lowey
Member of Congress



Rep. Gregory Meeks
Member of Congress



Rep. Jerrold Nadler
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Rep. José E. Serrano
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