

GARY LOCKE
Governor



STATE OF WASHINGTON
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August 31, 2001

The Honorable Tom Harkin
United States Senate
731 Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

I am writing to urge your support for increased funding for improvements to the food stamp program being considered for reauthorization under the Farm Bill. I understand the proposed legislation currently is before the Senate Agriculture Committee.

This bill, reported out by the House Agriculture Committee, is a good first step toward more effectively supporting working families. However, the funding increase approved by the House will be insufficient to really address the current access and administration issues facing the program.

I particularly advocate for restoration of food stamp benefits to legal immigrants who were barred from the program by the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act; for greater program flexibility to enhance services to working families, the disabled and the elderly; and for a revised performance measure/quality control system.

I am proud that Washington State has been a leader in restoring food assistance to legal immigrants through establishment of a state-funded program. I also am pleased that we obtained permission from Congress to purchase federal food stamps for this effort with state dollars, and that a dozen other states have followed our example. Since 1996, Congress has acted on only two occasions to restore federal food stamp eligibility to groups of legal immigrants who were previously barred. Providing food assistance to other legal immigrants still not covered by the federal program continues to cost the State of Washington \$5 million to \$6 million per year.

It is time for Congress to reconfirm its role in providing this fundamental safety net to all legal residents of the United States. Clearly, decisions about immigration policy are made at the national level. By extension, the responsibility for providing these needed services should also be the federal government's. The current reauthorization of the food stamp program is an opportunity for Congress to resume its responsibilities in this area. For this to be accomplished, additional funds must be added to the nutrition title of the Farm Bill.



The Honorable Tom Harkin
August 31, 2001
Page 2

In Washington, as in other states, the food stamp program plays a critical role in helping needy working families make the transition from welfare to self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, the complexity of current program rules makes it extremely difficult for them to access the services they need. Changes such as extending transitional benefits and making the reporting system more flexible with regard to small changes in earnings, are imperative.

I also support quality control system enhancements that reward positive outcomes. Currently, half of the states nationwide are sanctioned each year based on average error rates. Our agencies work very hard to meet their targets. At the same time, they have seen a sharp drop in food stamp program participation and are concerned that this focus on error reduction makes the program less accessible to those in need. I believe that system improvements can both lower the incidence of mistakes and ensure that vulnerable individuals receive essential services.

Again, I urge your support in approving an adequately funded nutrition title in the Farm Bill. Doing so will significantly strengthen our efforts at the state level to make this program work better for eligible individuals and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Locke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gary" being more prominent than the last name "Locke".

Gary Locke
Governor

cc: Washington State Congressional Delegation
Kari Burrell

FirstName	LastName	Address1
Tom	Harkin	731 Hart Building
Patrick	Leahy	433 Russell Senate Office Building
Kent	Conrad	530 Hart Senate Office Building
Tom Max	Daschle Baucus	511 Hart Building
Blanche	Lincoln	355 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Zell	Miller	257 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Debbie	Stabenow	702 Hart Senate Office Building
Ben	Nelson	720 Hart Senate Office Building
Mark	Dayton	SR- 346. Russell Senate Office Building
Paul	Wellstone	136 Hart Senate Office Building
Richard	Lugar	306 Hart Senate Office Building

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Jesse	Helms	403 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Thad Mitch	Cochran McConnell	361-A Russell Senate Office Building
Pat	Roberts	302 Hart Senate Office Building
Peter	Fitzgerald	555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Craig	Thomas	109 Hart Senate Office Building
Wayne	Allard	525 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Tim	Hutchinson	239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Mike	Crapo	111 Russell Senate Office Building