

October 13, 2005

Senator Patrick Leahy
Senate Agricultural Committee
433 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Leahy:

This letter is written on behalf of the 116,000 members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the thousands of hungry and food insecure families and individuals we serve across the nation every day of the year. Members see first hand those with dire needs. We ask that you do all in your power to protect the nutrition assistance programs under your committee's jurisdiction from actions in the budget reconciliation process.

With more than 25 million food stamp participants in fiscal year 2005 (50% children/ 8% elderly/ 12% disabled) it would be unconscionable to make cuts or change the structure of the program. This puts the most vulnerable in our country at the greatest risk. Also with the recent hurricane disaster in the south, nutrition assistance programs will be needed more than ever.

The food stamp program makes a difference in whether mothers, children, grandparents, the disabled, job seekers, the lowest wage earners have food to eat each day. The USDA has reported that 11% of US households (1.6 million) have trouble ensuring an adequate food supply, an increase of 2 million since 1999, and food stamp participation has increased by 8 million in the last five years. Only half of those eligible for food stamps access the programs because they are unaware that they qualify. No one should go hungry in our nation.

The primary goal of food and agriculture policy must be to provide basic food and nutrition for all. We cannot ignore the households with incomes below the poverty line in the United States. Let us find ways to help people survive. Let us encourage training that enables individuals and families to become self sufficient so that every person can live the American dream. Please do all you can to protect the food stamp program.

May God bless you in these difficult times and guide you in your service to the people of this great country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph D. Flannigan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Joseph Flannigan
National President
Society of St. Vincent de Paul