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Modernize Texas's SNAP Vehicle Limit: A Critical Step to Help Working Texans Feed Their Families

Submitted to

**Texas Senate
Health & Human Services Committee**

Submitted by

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Introduction

UnidosUS is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization and has built a stronger country by creating opportunities for Hispanics for more than 50 years. In this time, we have advanced opportunities for Hispanic children and working families to achieve the highest level of health possible. In this capacity, UnidosUS and its Affiliate Network of nearly 300 local, community-based organizations work diligently to ensure that the needs of our community are met. The UnidosUS Texas-based Affiliates include 28 community-based organizations that invest more than \$775 million and employ more than 6,200 staff to provide direct services to approximately 240,000 Texans and challenge the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Hispanics at the national, state, and local levels.

This written testimony will focus on the important role the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays during COVID-19 in Texas, the problems the state's existing SNAP vehicle limit creates for working families, and the need to modernize the limit to ensure that working Texans, including Hispanics, are able to put food on the table during the crisis and beyond. UnidosUS supports Senator Blanco's SB 1914 which would address some of the key barriers that exist with the current vehicle limits.

SNAP remains critical in reducing food insecurity for Hispanic children and families in Texas.

The health and economic crises resulting from COVID-19 have reinforced the important role that federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP, play in providing access to nutritious food. SNAP is the largest federal nutrition program and provides food assistance to nearly 40 million low-income individuals, including 3.4 million Texans.¹ Hispanics account for nearly half (48.9%) of the more than one million SNAP-participating households in Texas.² While Texas Hispanics have a higher labor force participation rate (65.9%) than all Texans (64.3%), SNAP remains critical for Hispanic families struggling to make ends meet.³ More than four million Texans are food insecure, including 1.6 million children.⁴ Hispanic children in Texas are also more than twice as likely as non-Hispanic White children to have experienced food insecurity during the pandemic.⁵

Unfortunately, Texas's current SNAP vehicle limit prevents many Texas working families that are food insecure from being able to access temporary food assistance. Texas currently places a cap on the value of the vehicles that a household may own to qualify for SNAP. The current limits are \$15,000 for the first vehicle and \$4,650 for the second or any additional vehicles, with any value above that level counted towards the \$5,000 resource limit. If a car's value exceeds these limits, it may disqualify the applicant from receiving SNAP benefits. This policy jeopardizes Texans' ability to make ends meet and feed their families. More than 60% of Hispanic adults in Texas are concerned about being unable to keep up with basic expenses, such as food, because of layoffs or pay cuts due to the pandemic.⁶ Families are also facing a tough choice: sell their vehicle and risk losing their job or keep the vehicle and risk going hungry because they make too much to qualify for SNAP but not enough to feed their families. Given Texas's geography, reliable vehicles are also a work necessity for Texans. In fact, 90% of Texas workers drive to work each day and the average commute time is 25 minutes.^{7,8} This policy also

creates barriers for working Hispanic families who belong to multigenerational households where most everyone works and needs more than one car to get to work.⁹

Modernizing Texas’s SNAP vehicle limit would ensure that working Texans can keep their jobs and put food on the table for their families. Raising the limits to \$22,500 for the first vehicle and 7000 for the second vehicle would allow for more Texans who are struggling to make ends meet to apply for temporary food assistance. Texas last changed the SNAP vehicle value limit in 2001. Modernizing the SNAP vehicle limit would ensure that families that need food assistance can access it without needing to jeopardize their means of transportation and their livelihood. It would also ensure that Texans, including Hispanics, can continue making vital contributions to the states’s ability to function.

Conclusion

About 11.5 million Hispanics live in Texas and account for nearly half (49%) of all children in the state.¹⁰ Investing in policies that remove barriers and increase access to participation in SNAP for Texans, including Hispanics, is key as the state continues to grapple with high rates of food insecurity. State policymakers have the opportunity now to address the urgent needs of our communities by taking immediate action to modernize the state’s SNAP vehicle limit. Doing so would better position the state and its residents, including Hispanics, for a healthier and more economically secure future.

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Texas: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Washington, DC: CBPP, March 2020), https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_texas.pdf (accessed April 8, 2021).

² U.S. Census Bureau, “2019: ACS 1-Year Estimates, Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin of Householder,” American Community Survey. Washington, DC, 2019, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=SNAP&g=0400000US48&tid=ACST1Y2019.S2201&hidePreview=true> (accessed April 8, 2021), Table S2201.

³ UnidosUS, Latinos in Texas: Protecting and Defending Progress in the Lone Star State (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, April 2019), <http://publications.unidosus.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/1942/latinosintexas.pdf?sequence=1-&isAllowed=y> (accessed April 8, 2021).

⁴ Feeding America, “Child Food Insecurity in Texas,” <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/child/texas> (accessed April 5, 2021).

⁵ UnidosUS, Food Insecurity in Texas Hispanic Children and Families (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, January 2021), <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/2112> (accessed April 12, 2021).

⁶ UnidosUS, Food Insecurity in Texas Hispanic Children and Families (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, January 2021), <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/2112> (accessed April 8, 2021).

⁷ DataUSA, “Texas,” <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/texas> (accessed April 12, 2021).

⁸ The Center Square, “Average one-way commute time for Texas residents reaches 26.4 minutes,” https://www.thecentersquare.com/texas/average-one-way-commute-time-for-texas-residents-reaches-26-4-minutes/article_41a9f7ce-18ad-11eb-a1de-c3514446a7e5.html (accessed April 12, 2021).

⁹ Juan Pablo Garnham, “With three generations under one roof, pandemic risks multiply,” *The Texas Tribune*, May 28, 2020, <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/05/28/texas-coronavirus-multigenerational-households/> (accessed April 12, 2021).

¹⁰ UnidosUS, Food Insecurity in Texas Hispanic Children and Families (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, January 2021), <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/2112> (accessed April 12, 2021).