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COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE (U.S.
HELSINKI COMMISSION)

October 24, 2025

The Honorable Bill Lee
Governor of Tennessee
State Capitol
600 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

I write to urge you to act swiftly to ensure Tennesseans do not go hungry amid the federal government shutdown. More than 690,000 Tennesseans rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to keep food on the table. With federal benefits at risk of suspension in November, your administration has both the means and the moral obligation to step in and provide temporary assistance to those in need.

Tennessee currently maintains a rainy-day fund exceeding \$2 billion, designed precisely for moments of crisis. If losing food assistance for nearly one in ten Tennesseans does not constitute an emergency, it is difficult to imagine what would. A short-term infusion of state resources could prevent catastrophic consequences for families, seniors, veterans, children, and people with disabilities who depend on SNAP to survive.

Inaction would also place unsustainable strain on our state's already overburdened food banks, which simply cannot fill the gap left by the loss of federal benefits. Every dollar of SNAP generates economic activity in our communities, supporting grocers, farmers, and local economies. Allowing these benefits to lapse would ripple far beyond individual households, harming small businesses and local food systems statewide.

Today, I joined my colleagues in calling on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to use contingency funds and all available authorities to extend federal SNAP benefits. But as long as there remains uncertainty at the federal level, I urge you to act now to provide emergency support from Tennessee's reserves to prevent widespread hunger and hardship.

I respectfully request that your administration immediately identify and deploy available resources to assist families at risk of losing their benefits. Tennesseans should not be made to skip meals or choose between food, rent, and medicine because of political gridlock in Washington.

This is a moment for compassion and leadership. I trust that you will do what is right to ensure that no Tennessean goes hungry.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" and last name "Cohen" clearly distinguishable.

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress