

April 29, 2026

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chair  
House Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable John Hoeven  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee  
United States Senate

The Honorable Andy Harris  
Chair  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee  
United States Senate

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairs Cole, Collins, Harris, Hoeven, Murray, and Ranking Members Bishop, Jr., DeLauro, and Shaheen:

As work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies spending bill continues, the undersigned organizations respectfully urge you to reject efforts to include policy riders or report language that weaken strong nutrition standards for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food package. In addition, we urge you to bolster funding for critical programs that support children's health and ensure these programs have the resources they need to serve healthy, wholesome foods to our children.

**National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, & Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**

Strong school meal nutrition standards, which have been required to align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans since 2004, remain one of the most important public health achievements in decades. A 2021 study found school meals to be the healthiest source of food

for children – more nutritious than food from grocery stores, restaurants, and other sources.<sup>1</sup> Schools are still implementing the 2024 U.S. USDA rule (89 FR 31962) updating the school nutrition standards, which includes the first-ever added sugars limits; we strongly oppose policy riders or report language that block or weaken implementation of these evidence-based nutrition standards in the NSLP and SBP.<sup>2</sup>

The current standards are feasible without granting exemptions or carveouts. Research and anecdotal evidence demonstrate that many schools are already meeting, and in some cases, exceeding, updated nutrition standards, serving healthy and delicious meals to their students.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the largest food companies have many K-12 products that meet the added sugars, sodium, and whole grain-rich standards, thus further facilitating maintenance of strong standards.<sup>4,5</sup>

However, school nutrition programs are in a fiscal crisis and continue to face rising food costs, labor shortages, and increasing public criticism. As the Administration pursues policies aligned with the new DGA, it is important to ensure these programs have the resources they need to be successful. Several solutions and supportive programs already exist and must be maintained and significantly expanded. We urge Congress to:

- Increase **school meal and CACFP reimbursement** rates. Specifically, increase school breakfast reimbursement by \$0.28 per meal, school lunch reimbursement by \$0.45 per meal, and increase CACFP reimbursement by \$0.10 for each meal and snack served.
- Fund **school kitchen equipment grants** at \$35,000,000 to support schools in serving healthier foods. School kitchen equipment grants are nowhere near the investment needed to meet the new DGA goals of more made-from-scratch meals and fewer harmful processed foods being served.
- Provide **Team Nutrition**, USDA’s school nutrition technical assistance program, with at least \$25,000,000 to support schools through training, education, and sharing of best practices. In the past (FY21-23), Congress has appropriated an additional \$2,000,000 for this purpose, but additional funding is necessary, especially to combat the more recent reduction to \$18,004,000 in FY24 and FY25.
- Fund the **Institute for Child Nutrition (ICN)**, the only federally funded center dedicated to research, training, and technical assistance for child nutrition programs, at \$2,000,000. ICN allows school foodservice professionals to learn from child nutrition experts how to incorporate more fresh and local menu items.
- Fund the **Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program** at \$14,000,000 to support schools in procuring fresh food from local growers and producers, creating a win-win for local

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<sup>1</sup> Liu J, et al. Trends in Food Sources and Diet Quality Among US Children and Adults, 2003-2018. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021;4(4):e215262.

<sup>2</sup> 89 Fed. Reg. 31962. Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

<sup>3</sup> Chapman LE, et al. Nutrient Content and Compliance with Sodium Standards in Elementary School Meals in the United States Pre- and Post-COVID-19. *Nutrients*. 2022;14(24):5386.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Science in the Public Interest. *2021 School Meals Corporate Report Card*. November 2021. <https://www.cspinet.org/resource/school-meals-corporate-report-card-2021>. Accessed March 19, 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Center for Science in the Public Interest. *Behind the Carton: 2022 School Milk Report*. December 2022. <https://www.cspinet.org/resource/behind-carton-school-milk-report-2022>. Accessed March 19, 2026.

economies and nutritious food for kids. In addition, the maximum grant award should be increased to \$500,000 to support larger, regional projects. The 2025 cuts and abrupt cancellations of local food procurement programs were major hits to schools already facing rising food and labor costs and directly impacted local farmers' bottom lines.

### **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**

WIC is a primary defense against food and nutrition insecurity while also stimulating local economies.<sup>6</sup> WIC has a proven track record of reducing hunger, improving diet quality, and preventing disease.<sup>7</sup> We strongly oppose any riders changing the science-based updates and/or interfering with implementation of the most recent WIC food package (89 FR 28488).

Inadequately funding WIC threatens to harm the food and nutrition security of families and could reverse hard-won gains in the enrollment of eligible participants. For nearly 30 years, there has been a bipartisan agreement in Congress to support WIC. To sustain WIC's long-proven health benefits for families and children, Congress must:

- **Fully fund WIC** to ensure it can meet projected caseloads. In addition, we urge appropriators, in partnership with USDA, to monitor trends in participation and food costs and ensure sufficient funding and adjust if necessary.
- **Include the provisions of the MODERN WIC Act/21<sup>st</sup> Century WIC Act**, which ensure that virtual access to WIC services continues beyond the current September expiration date.
- **Provide sufficient resources within the WIC contingency fund** to support WIC operations for approximately one month. This funding is crucial for supporting temporary program operations during increasingly frequent government shutdowns. Congress should also increase WIC's spend-forward authority to 10 percent to improve state agencies' ability to make multi-year financial plans.

In closing, we again urge you to pass an FY 2027 appropriations bill devoid of riders and report language that would hinder or harm essential nutrition programs, including the NSLP, SBP, CACFP, and WIC. In addition, we urge you to prioritize increased funds for kitchen equipment grants, technical assistance for child nutrition programs, farm to school initiatives, and increase reimbursement for school meals and CACFP. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you on achieving our shared goals of keeping children healthy.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Better Children's Diets  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Heart Association  
American Public Health Association  
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. *How WIC Helps*. 2025. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/helps> Accessed March 20, 2026.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2025.

Balanced  
CACFP Roundtable  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Chef Ann Foundation  
Farm Sanctuary  
Friends of the Earth  
Healthy Schools Campaign  
National Education Association  
National Farm to School Network  
National WIC Association  
Nourish Colorado  
Partnership for a Healthier America  
Pilot Light  
Save the Children  
Trust for America's Health  
Voices for Georgia's Children