

June 24, 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski and Senator Gillibrand,

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children a priority in federal budget and policy decisions, I am writing to express our support for the Summer Meals Act of 2019 (S.1908). This legislation is an important component of the comprehensive package needed to fight summer hunger for millions of our nation's children.

As you know, food insecurity is a devastating reality for 12.5 million—or 1 in 6—children across the country. For these children, many of whom are already exposed to the harmful effects of poverty, this inconsistent access to enough healthy food creates yet another obstacle to their ability to learn, grow, and thrive. Child Nutrition Programs such as the National School Lunch Program and National School Breakfast Program, and Summer Food Service Program are instrumental in ensuring that such children can count on a nourishing meal at school or at a congregate feeding site in the summer. Unfortunately 83 percent of the low-income children enrolled in School Meal programs are not accessing nutrition during the summer. For more than 17 million children, summer is the hungriest time of the year.

First Focus Campaign for Children knows it will take a multi-pronged approach to ensure that these children have enough to eat during the summer months. This includes strengthening and expanding summer meal sites so that they are accessible to more children, extending the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program so that families can purchase additional food for their children during the summer, and, where appropriate, establishing non-congregate models to fill in the gaps. The Summer Meals Act of 2019 takes the important step of ensuring more low-income children can access nutrition and learning enrichment at summer meal sites by reducing the area-eligibility threshold from 50 to 40 percent, providing transportation grants, increasing the number of meals available, and reducing paperwork burden for sponsors. We look forward to the process of Child Nutrition Reauthorization as an opportunity to incorporate your legislation into a comprehensive package that closes the summer hunger gap.

Thank you for your long-standing commitment to ending summer hunger and important leadership in this area. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that Child Nutrition Reauthorization makes critical investments to increase the reach of summer nutrition to guarantee that kids are not hungry during the long summer vacation and return to school in the fall healthy and ready to learn.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline under the word "Lesley".

Bruce Lesley, President