

CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION TOPLINE PRIORITIES

Updated September, 2019



Federal child nutrition programs are critically important supports that provide poor and low-income children with nutritious food so that they can learn, grow, and thrive. However, gaps remain that prevent federal child nutrition programs from fully addressing the problem of child food insecurity, which currently impacts 12.5 million—or one in six—children. As Congress undertakes the process of Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR), lawmakers must make significant investments that strengthen these critical programs and expand access so that all children have the healthy food they need to thrive. This document provides a brief overview of our key CNR priorities.

1. End Summer Hunger

Summer is the hungriest season for the 83 percent (17 million) of children who receive free or reduced-price meals during the school year but do not have access to a Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) site. Policies to address this disparity include:

- » **Strengthen Summer Food Sites:** Increase the availability of sites by lowering the area-eligibility threshold to 40 percent, investing in transportation grants, and streamlining the application process for sponsors (e.g. *Summer Meals Act of 2019, S. 1908/H.R. 2818*).
- » **Expand Summer EBT:** Maintain the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) in states where it already exists and extend it to all other children who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (e.g. *Stop Child Summer Hunger Act of 2019, S. 1941/H.R. 3378*).
- » **Establishing Non-Congregate Models:** Establish non-congregate feeding models for children who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch to fill in the gaps where congregate sites and Summer EBT are not feasible, while maintaining nutrition and safety standards and continuing to incentivize more robust SFSP programming (e.g. *Hunger Free Summer for Kids Act of 2019, S. 1918*).

2. Protect and Strengthen School Meal Programs

The School Lunch Program (SLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) serve nutritious free or reduced-price meals to 20.2 million and 12 million low-income children each year, respectively. However, the harmful practice “lunch shaming,” burdensome paperwork and eligibility processes, and efforts to roll back nutrition standards threaten the ability of these programs to fight food insecurity and keep children healthy. Policies to protect and expand access to the SLP and SBP include:

- » **End Lunch Shaming:** Prohibit the practice of shaming or stigmatizing students with unpaid school meal debt, require schools to directly certify students for free school meals if they have unpaid fees and are eligible, provide additional funding for retroactive certification (e.g. *Anti-Lunch Shaming Act of 2019, S. 1119/H.R. 2311*; *No Shame at School Act of 2019, S. 1907/H.R. 3366*).
- » **Streamline Eligibility and Increase Access:** Protect and expand the Community Eligibility Provision to streamline school meal eligibility for low-income children; expand Direct Certification to apply to children who are in formal kinship care arrangements. (e.g. *Schools Preventing Hunger in At-Risk Kids Act, H.R. 4259*)

- » **Improve and Invest in Nutrition Standards:** Restore strong, evidence-based school food nutrition standards that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (including the development of a standard for added sugars), provide additional funding for technical assistance for schools to meet the standards (e.g. *School Food Modernization Act of 2019 S.1949/ H.R. 3444*), increase reimbursements for breakfast and lunch commodities to support healthier ingredients.

3. CLOSE GAPS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NUTRITION

Early childhood is a critical season of development, underscoring the importance of good nutrition that helps children stay healthy, thrive and learn as their brains are growing. The Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (WIC) both fight food insecurity and improve health and nutritional outcomes in participating young children and infants. CACFP subsidizes nutritious meals and snacks served to 4.5 million low-income infants and children in participating day care facilities, emergency shelters, and at-risk afterschool programs, while WIC provides federal grants to states for supplemental health care referrals, nutrition education, and food packages for some 7.6 million low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants and young children who are nutritionally at risk. However, there remain gaps in access to these important supports. Policies to close those gaps include:

- » **Expand Access:** Reduce the CACFP area-eligibility threshold to 40 percent for children in home daycare programs so that more home care providers can qualify for reimbursement, expand WIC eligibility to children through age 5 so that they do not lose nutrition if they are not yet participating in school meals (e.g. *Access to Healthy Foods for Young Children Act*)
- » **Strengthen Programming:** Increase CACFP reimbursements to make it more feasible for providers to participate in the program, update the CACFP meal pattern so that that child care providers can provide an additional daily meal or snack to children who are in their care for a full day, better meeting the scheduling realities facing working families, invest in WIC breast feeding peer counseling.
- » **Streamline Eligibility:** increase WIC infant and post-partum certification to two years to prevent program drop-off (e.g. *Wise Investment in Our Children Act of 2019, , S.2358*), fund WIC community health partnership grants (e.g. *CARE for Families Act of 2019, H.R. 3117*)

4. OPPOSE EFFORTS TO WEAKEN OR REDUCE ACCESS TO CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

The above priorities require robust investment. However, any increases in funding must not come at the expense of existing child nutrition programming. We oppose efforts to reduce access to programs by limiting or undermining community/adjunctive eligibility, increasing verification, or other harmful proposals. Similarly, we oppose efforts in any child nutrition program to erode science-based nutrition standards that follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (e.g. *Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2019, H.R. 832; Milk in Lunches for Kids Act of 2019, S.1810, Smart Nutrition and Choices for Kids and Schools Act, H.R. 3291*).