



FIRST FOCUS

CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

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May 15, 2017

The Honorable Tom Udall
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Casey
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ben Ray Luján
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rodney Davis
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Udall, Senator Heinrich, Senator Casey, Congresswoman Lujan Grisham, Congressman Luján, Congressman Davis, Congresswoman DeLauro and Congressman Scott:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to thank you for your leadership in introducing the Anti-Lunch Shaming Act (S. 1064/H.R. 2401).

As an organization committing to securing a bright future for America's most vulnerable children and youth, we applaud efforts to ensure that no child goes hungry or is shamed because their family is struggling to make ends meet.

More than 53 million children receive critical nutrition through federal school meal programs each year. These meals support healthy child development and academic achievement. Many children living in low-income families qualify for free or reduced price school meals, however, not all children who qualify are enrolled in these programs due to bureaucratic barriers or lack of knowledge about the program. In addition, there are children enrolled to receive a reduced price lunch but their family still cannot afford to come up with the difference.

As a result, some schools have adopted the practice of penalizing students who have outstanding school lunch debt through stigmatizing them with a cold, brown bag lunch, hand stamps or wristbands, or denying them lunch altogether. It is unconscionable that in a country as wealthy as the U.S., we would deny children proper nutrition and publicly shame them because of their family's economic status.

The Anti-Lunch Shaming Act would ban schools from stigmatizing children whose parents cannot afford to pay for their school lunches. It would require schools to direct communications about unpaid school lunch bills to the parent, rather than penalizing the child. In addition, it would streamline the application and payment process for free and reduced price lunch and coordinate with child welfare and homeless assistance systems to ensure that students who automatically qualify for these programs become enrolled.

We are grateful for your leadership in making children, youth and families a legislative priority, and we look forward to working with you on this and other proposals to improve the well-being of America's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley, President