



May 23, 2023

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
284 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear Senator Rubio,

I am writing on behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal budget and policy decisions, to express our support for the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Nutrition Act of 2023 (S. 1639).

The Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Nutrition Act of 2023 builds on the success of the United States Department of Agriculture's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). The FFVP assists elementary schools in purchasing fresh produce for their students. The program prioritizes schools with high enrollment in free and reduced-price meal programs to ensure that children from low-income households have access to the nutrition they deserve. This legislation also expands the program to include middle and high schools, ensuring that children of all ages can consume the produce they need to thrive.

At a time when nearly half of all children ages 1-5 in the United States are not eating even one vegetable per day, the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Nutrition Act of 2023 will take strides to ensure that our children have access to the valuable vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants found in produce.<sup>1</sup> Science shows that children's nutrition is directly linked with healthy development and a healthy diet reduces a child's risk of obesity, diabetes, and developing chronic conditions like heart disease, tooth decay, high blood pressure, and cancer later in life.<sup>2</sup> A diet high in fruits and vegetables during childhood can ward off chronic disease throughout a child's life.<sup>3</sup>

Students who are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches but instead bring meals and snacks from home consume significantly more saturated fat and sugar and significantly less fruit than their NSPL-participating counterparts, further demonstrating that school meals may be one of

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<sup>1</sup> Hamner, Heather C. et al. "Fruit, Vegetable, and Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Intake Among Young Children, by State — United States, 2021." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. February 17, 2023.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7207a1.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> "Childhood Nutrition Facts." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. August 5, 2022.

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/facts.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Sharps, Maxine and Robinson, Eric. "Encouraging children to eat more fruit and vegetables: Health vs. descriptive social norm-based messages." *Appetite*, Vol. 100. May 1, 2016.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4819560/>.

the few sources of foods and vegetables for low-income children.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, introducing fruits and vegetables to children's diets at a young age helps children's taste preferences develop towards produce, helping them to create healthier eating habits for a lifetime.

We commend you for your efforts to ensure that America's students have access to a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables. This legislation has the potential to set America's children up for a healthier life. We look forward to working with you to pass the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Act of 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink color.

Bruce Lesley  
President

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<sup>4</sup> Vernarelli, Jacqueline A., O'Brien, Brady. "A Vote for School Lunches: School Lunches Provide Superior Nutrient Quality than Lunches Obtained from Other Sources in a Nationally Representative Sample of US Children." *Nutrients*, Vol 9(9). August 24, 2017. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28837090/>.