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CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION

2019 Legislative Priorities

Child Hunger in the United States

Households with children are far more likely to be food insecure (17 percent) than households without children (13 percent). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates more than 12 million children live in food insecure households. While hunger affects people of all ages, it is particularly harmful for children, for whom the repercussions of poor nutrition and hunger are more severe. Food insecure children are more likely to experience:

- Learning and academic difficulties, reduced concentration, and lower test scores;
- School absenteeism and tardiness, making them 1.4 times more likely to repeat a grade
- Poorer general health and one-third greater likelihood of a history of hospitalization.

PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD HUNGER

Federal nutrition programs target low-income children at different ages and in different settings to reduce hunger and promote nutrition. WIC reaches children from birth to preschool, while school breakfast and lunch programs serve school-aged children. Food banks and other nonprofits operate summer, afterschool, and weekend programs to make sure children have nutritious food when school is out. The successful, cost-effective federal nutrition programs play a critical role in helping children in low-income families achieve access to quality nutrition, child care, educational and enrichment activities while improving their overall health, development, and academic school achievement.

CONGRESS MUST STRENGTHEN CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Child nutrition programs provide a critical safeguard against hunger, but they are only effective when they reach the children who need help. Too many children are left without the nutrition they need when they are away from school.

All too often, hungry kids lack access to food simply because a program is not offered in their community or they cannot access a program site, especially over the summer. Of the nearly 22 million children who receive lunch assistance at school, 3.7 million receive food assistance on a typical summer day. Congress has an important opportunity to improve the health of millions of our nation's children by strengthening child nutrition programs, especially during out-of-school times when children are hard to reach.

LEARNING ABOUT PROGRAMS FIRSTHAND

There is no better way to learn about child hunger and see how child nutrition programs are working than to visit a child feeding program. The food banks in your state partner with schools and nonprofits to feed children after school, on weekends, and during the summer. Contact your food bank to arrange a visit and learn how programs could be strengthened to better meet your constituents' needs:

www.feedingamerica.org/foodbank

Child Nutrition Reauthorization Policy Recommendations

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES' ABILITY TO REACH KIDS DURING THE SUMMER

Only 17 percent of low-income children who receive lunch assistance during the school year receive food assistance through a summer feeding site. We need a two-pronged strategy that makes it easier for communities to establish summer feeding sites in underserved areas and also gives communities the flexibility to reach kids in alternate ways. First, aligning the area eligibility requirement for summer feeding and educational programs would allow more learning programs to offer meals in the summer. Second, allowing communities to adopt alternate program models in areas where children lack access to a program site could ensure more kids have the nutrition they need. This includes proven strategies such as giving families a summer grocery card to supplement their household food budget, and allowing kids to consume meals off-site or in their home.

STREAMLINE RULES FOR COMMUNITY BASED PROVIDERS

Currently, community-based organizations like food banks and other nonprofits must switch between two programs—the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) during the school year and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) during the summer—to provide meals to children when they are not in school, even though they are serving the same kids, often at the same sites. Allowing nonprofits to operate SFSP year-round, eliminating duplicative administrative processes, and aligning inconsistent program requirements, would allow nonprofits to focus on feeding hungry kids, not pushing paperwork.

ALLOW FLEXIBILITY TO BETTER REACH KIDS DURING WEEKENDS

Many children struggle with hunger on the weekend. Without designated space to house a program or a busing system to transport children, the logistics are often too difficult to operate a weekend feeding site. Currently, communities have limited ability to support them due to rigid rules requiring kids to consume meals on-site. By allowing targeted flexibility from the on-site requirement, communities could innovate more effective ways to serve kids, such as sending children home from school or a feeding site with nutritious meals or groceries.

STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS AND WIC

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs provide nutritious meals to millions of children across the country and play an important role in reducing hunger, improving nutrition, and supporting learning. Just over half of children receiving lunch assistance also eat school breakfast, and more can be done to improve access to this most important meal of the day. We should continue to support schools as they strive to improve the nutritional quality of meals, providing support, equipment, and training to meet the guidelines set in the last child nutrition bill. WIC provides low-income at-risk pregnant and postpartum mothers and young children with health and social service referrals, and culturally appropriate nutritious foods that contribute to their overall health and well-being. Fewer than half of eligible children ages one to four participate in WIC, and we must ensure families' access to the important nutrition and health benefits that WIC provides.