Protect and Strengthen Child Nutrition Programs

Please speak directly to congressional leadership, particularly House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline and/or Ranking Member Robert C. “Bobby” Scott or Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts and/or Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow, urging them to protect and strengthen vital child nutrition programs that support low-income children. Specifically, urge them to:

* Invest in and improve upon child nutrition programs in the 2015 Child Nutrition Reauthorization without jeopardizing other critical safety-net programs.
* Expand access to child nutrition programs in the summer.
* Increase access to the WIC program by prioritizing EBT delivery by 2020 and expanding eligibility for WIC for children until age 6, when many enter school and become eligible for school meals.

Low-Income Children at Risk of Poor Nutrition and Health Outcomes

Access to appropriate nutrition is one of the most fundamental and crucial building blocks of a child’s development. Hungry children often suffer from cognitive and behavioral deficits, developmental delays, and poorer school achievement. These lifelong implications highlight the importance of ensuring that all children receive the nutrients they need to develop healthily so they can become full-functioning members of society. Children from low-income families are significantly more likely to be food insecure, and to have other poor nutritional outcomes such as obesity. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

* 19.5 percent of households with children were food insecure in 2013
* 20.9 percent of households with children under six were food insecure in 2013

These figures represent some of the 8.6 million children who were living in food insecure households in 2013. Child nutrition programs are an important safety net for these children to receive nutritious meals at school, childcare centers, and summer programs. Research shows that participation in federal nutrition programs leads to healthier diets, lower rates of nutritional deficiency, and lower obesity rates.

With the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act set to expire on September 30, 2015, it is important for Congress to work to ensure that vital child nutrition programs continue to serve the millions of children currently participating and to improve upon the programs to allow them to reach more eligible households. For example, only 1 in 6 children who receive free or reduced lunch during the school year have access to summer meals. Child nutrition reauthorization provides an opportunity for Congress to protect and bolster these programs to close the gaps and ensure that children have year-round access to nutritious meals. We urge members of Congress to support:

* The bipartisan Summer Meals Act of 2015 (H.R. 1728, S. 613) to increase the number of low-income children who have access to summer meals
* The Stop Child Summer Hunger Act of 2015 (H.R. 2715, S. 1539) to provide access to summer EBT cards for low-income families with children.
* The Wise Investment in our Children Act (WIC Act, H.R. 2660) to extend eligibility for WIC up to age six.

Protecting and improving these federal child nutrition programs must be made a congressional priority in order to ensure the health and wellbeing of all American children. **We urge you to protect and strengthen these programs without making cuts to other crucial safety net programs.**