

November 4, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy, and Leader McConnell:

Parents and families faced new and unprecedented challenges this year in feeding their children, from rising food prices to disruptions in the infant formula market stemming from Abbott Nutrition's recall. Frontline providers for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) went above and beyond to support families in their community with the resources and nutrition services needed to put food on the table and deliver a healthy start for their children. As WIC reaches nearly half of all infants in the United States, Congress must take action to ensure the program remains nimble and can adapt to an increasingly digital food and healthcare environment. On behalf of the undersigned national organizations, we urge Congress to deliver on the following priorities before the end of the calendar year.

First, we urge Congress to **sustain WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit through annual appropriations**. In fiscal year 2022, Congress modified benefit issuance to reflect 50 percent of fruit and vegetable intake recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs). This science-based modification has stimulated new economic activity, returned investment up the supply chain to retail stores and producers, and delivered improved nutrition outcomes for nearly 5 million women and young children across the country. Earlier this year, the National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute identified a ¼ cup per day increase in fruit and vegetable intake among WIC-enrolled toddlers attributable to this enhanced issuance. To build on WIC's progress in improving dietary outcomes for the next generation, we urge extension of this fruit and vegetable bump through the remainder of the fiscal year.

We also urge legislators to **pass into law a comprehensive, bipartisan Child Nutrition Reauthorization**. WIC and other child nutrition programs – including school meals, summer feeding programs, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) – have not been reauthorized in 12 years. This delay has limited the scope of efforts to modernize systems, streamline processes, and reduce burden on families and program providers. When WIC was last reauthorized, the overwhelming majority of WIC agencies were still issuing benefits through paper vouchers. The time has come to modernize service delivery and leverage lessons learned while operating these programs during COVID-19 to enhance these programs' public health impacts. In finalizing a Child Nutrition Reauthorization, Congress should:

- **Extend eligibility for postpartum women and young children**, as detailed in the bipartisan *Wise Investment in our Children Act* (S. 853/H.R. 2011) and echoed in the *Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act* (S. 346/H.R. 959) and the *Providing for Life Act* (S. 4868/H.R. 8851). Closing nutrition gaps in the inter-pregnancy period and before children enter school will strengthen WIC's role in assuring healthier outcomes during these critical

periods of development, tackling chronic diet-related conditions such as obesity and diabetes, and setting the stage for the next generation to attain future life success.

- **Modernize WIC service delivery.** Before the COVID-19 pandemic, WIC was reaching a smaller share of the eligible population – including only 57 percent of all eligible individuals and a diminishing share of eligible children. Building on prior innovations, pandemic-era flexibilities such as remote certifications and benefit issuance contributed to an 11 percent increase in child participation, reversing longstanding participation trends. Certification reforms that incorporate technology while preserving WIC’s public health character, reflected in the bipartisan *MODERN WIC Act* (S. 3226/H.R. 6781) and the bipartisan *WIC for Kids Act* (H.R. 4455), can facilitate program access and participant retention to maximize WIC’s public health outcomes. Additional efforts to streamline program management – such as efforts to facilitate online shopping and support multi-year technology investments in both WIC and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program – will bolster ongoing innovation efforts at the State and local levels.
- **Invest in the nation’s infant feeding infrastructure.** The February recall of Abbott Nutrition infant formula products exposed vulnerabilities in the nation’s infant feeding infrastructure, which has consistently underinvested in lactation support. We applaud the immediate bipartisan response in passing the *Access to Baby Formula Act* in May 2022, but we urge Congress to take a more comprehensive approach. In the first five months of the recall, WIC recorded a 9 percent increase in breastfed infants, including a 17 percent increase in exclusively breastfed infants. Efforts to promote competition in the infant formula sector, such as the bipartisan *WIC Healthy Beginnings Act* (S. 3216/H.R. 7603), and build out community infrastructure for human milk feeding, incorporated in the *Access to Donor Milk Act* (H.R. 9196), should be paired with new investments in WIC’s breastfeeding support as a critical next step in a broader, cross-agency evaluation of how infant feeding is promoted and supported in this country.

WIC’s success is rooted in its strong public health record: improving pregnancy and birth outcomes, improving dietary quality, mitigating childhood obesity and other chronic diet-related conditions, and reducing overall healthcare costs. While all of the undersigned organizations may not have taken a position on the specific legislation referenced and may have additional WIC priorities, we are in strong agreement that Congress must act to achieve these four overarching goals to build modern and accessible WIC services. As Congress works to finalize priorities for the year, we urge legislators to seize this opportunity to strengthen WIC services and provide a healthy start for America’s next generation.

Sincerely,

National WIC Association
A Better Balance
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Alliance to End Hunger
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Heart Association
American Society for Nutrition
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Bread for the World
Bright Future Lactation Resource Centre Ltd.
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Children's HealthWatch
Coalition on Human Needs
FARE (Food Allergy Research and Education)
Farmers Market Coalition
Farmlink Project
First Focus Campaign for Children
FoodFinder
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
Healthy Children Project, Inc.
Hunger Free America
International Fresh Produce Association
La Leche League of the United States of America
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Counties (NACo)
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Lactation Consultant Alliance
National League for Nursing
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Women's Law Center
Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nurse-Family Partnership
RESULTS
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)
SimpliFed
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Souper Bowl of Caring, Inc.
U.S. Breastfeeding Committee

cc: The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
The Honorable Kay Granger
The Honorable Bobby Scott
The Honorable Virginia Foxx

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
The Honorable Richard Shelby
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
The Honorable John Boozman