

The

Food Policy

Working Group

December 2, 2003

President George Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Food Policy Working Group (FPWG) is a coalition of faith-based and other community organizations deeply concerned about the fact that children still go hungry in our nation. Over 13 million children in America live in households that struggle to put food on the table.

Mr. President, you can lead the effort to eliminate childhood hunger. America has the programs in place to combat childhood hunger; we need only a relatively small increase in funding and investment to eliminate it. We ask you to make ending childhood hunger a priority in the FY05 budget you submit to Congress. **Specifically, please include new money in the budget to expand the child nutrition programs so that all eligible children can participate in them.**

Expanding the child nutrition programs will help ensure children's access to nutritious meals. Inspired by faith to help those who are hungry, many of our member churches and synagogues provide emergency food assistance. Some members of the faith community also sponsor Summer Food Service program sites and access the Child and Adult Care Food Program to help fund meals and snacks provided to low-income children. Others are ready to help but need program changes that increase reimbursement levels and decrease paperwork.

Expanding the child nutrition programs also fits with how the public would like to see hunger addressed. Recent polling data from the Alliance to End Hunger provides insights on how Americans think about hunger. Over half of those polled said the government spends too little on fighting hunger. Overwhelming majorities support both an expansion of school breakfast (75%) and summer meals (74.9%). (*Hunger: An Emerging Issue*, Findings of the Bipartisan Hunger Message Project, June 5, 2003.)

We all agree that no child should worry where their next meal is coming from. The attached document contains specific program changes that can reduce childhood hunger. It is of primary importance that the participation of eligible children in the programs be increased. For example, among children eligible for free meal certification in the National School Lunch Program, a recent USDA study estimates that 31 percent are not certified to receive free meals, and about three-fourths of these children do not even receive reduced-price meals. We also implore you **not** to support verification policies that have the unintended effect of decreasing participation of eligible children. We can reduce errors and achieve program savings by other, less harmful means.

Please consider the importance of these programs and the enormous benefits of good nutrition in learning, in creating a strong workforce, and in protecting our nation. Put simply, there are no

drawbacks to reducing childhood hunger. We look forward to working with your Administration and Congress to make this critical investment.

Sincerely,

America's Second Harvest
Bread for the World
Coalition on Human Needs
Congressional Hunger Center
Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Food Research and Action Center
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness
National Council of Churches
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
Reconciliation Ministries, Board of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA
RESULTS
The Capital Area Food Bank
The Episcopal Church, USA
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
Union for Reform Judaism
Volunteers of America

cc: Mr. H. James Towey
Deputy Assistant to the President and
Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
The White House
Washington, DC 20502

Ms. Terrell L. Halaska
Special Assistant to the President
Domestic Policy Council
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20502

Mr. James Capretta
Associate Director for Human Resource Programs
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

**The Food Policy Working Group
Recommendations for Child Nutrition Reauthorization**

Summer Food Service Program – 1) Expand the “Lugar Summer Food Pilots” to all 50 states and to all sponsors. Currently the Lugar pilots are operating for only “public sponsors.” The paperwork is simply overwhelming for small organizations starting the program. 2) Reduce the area eligibility for the program from 50% to 40% of children eligible for free and reduced-price meals. This is particularly important in rural areas. 3) Fund competitive start up grants.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) – 1) Reduce the area eligibility for CACFP from 50% to 40%. 2) Extend the age of children in homeless shelters eligible for reimbursement

for meals and snacks from the current age of 12 to children up through age 18. This change would be especially helpful to non-profits providing shelter to families. 3) Expand the current supper pilot program. Because more children in childcare have parents who work non-traditional hours, it becomes important for childcare providers to be able to serve an evening meal. 4) Increase reimbursement rates so that providers will be able to purchase higher quality foods such as fruits and vegetables.

School Breakfast Program – 1) Provide start up grants for the lowest performing states. 2) Establish universal breakfast pilots for secondary schools in low-income areas. 3) Provide additional funds for the purchase of commodities. 4) Expand breakfast in the classroom opportunities in elementary schools in low-income areas.

School Lunch Program – In addition to ensuring that no harm is done through an expansion of income documentation requirements, ensure that all children have access to nutritious meals. There is evidence that many children in the reduced price category have difficulty affording the 40 cents every day for lunch. Research has found that reduced price participation declines toward the end of the month. Therefore, eliminate the reduced-price meal category by bringing the “free” category up to 185% of poverty.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – 1) Fully fund WIC so that all women, infants, and children who are eligible for the program are able to participate. 2) Increase the Nutrition Service and Administrative (NSA) funding for nutrition education, and provide additional money to upgrade information systems. 3) Allow states the option to extend certification periods for children and breastfeeding women for up to one year.

For additional information contact Kay Bengston, Assistant Director – Domestic Policy, Lutheran Office For Governmental Affairs, ELCA, Chair of the Food Policy Working Group; 122 C St. NW, #125; Washington, DC 20001; Phone: (202) 626-7942; E-mail: kay_bengston@elca.org.