

May 18, 2004

Senator Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Agriculture Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Tom Harkin
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Harkin:

As organizations committed to improving the health, education and welfare of our nation's children, we wish to extend our sincere appreciation for all your efforts in developing the "Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004." We believe that this legislation strikes the right balance between needed program improvements while maintaining the integrity of the programs. The draft legislation includes many of our joint priorities, especially increasing access to programs for low-income children; enhancing the nutritional quality of meals and improving nutrition education; and providing additional resources to vulnerable populations, such as homeless, runaway and migrant children.

Given this year's tight budget constraints, we are delighted that the Committee was able to permanently authorize: the eligibility of for-profit child care centers for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) if 25% of children are eligible for free or reduced price meals; the exclusion of privatized military housing from income when determining eligibility for school meals; and the extension and expansion of the popular "Lugar summer food pilots," to additional states as well as to non-profit sponsors. In addition to program improvements in the House bill (H.R. 3873), we are also pleased that the draft Senate bill includes: mandatory direct certification phase-in for food stamp households applying for free or reduced price meals; a CACFP pilot which expands area eligibility for family child care in rural areas; a 3-year summer food rural transportation pilot; continuation and expansion of the current fresh fruit and vegetable pilots with special emphasis on serving children in low-income areas; and the potential for pilots to offer free meals to households with incomes up to 185% of poverty.

We will continue to work with you and the Agriculture Committee staff in order to ensure that child nutrition reauthorization moves expeditiously through the Senate and conference. Again, thank you for all your hard work on behalf of our nation's youth.

Sincerely,

American Dietetic Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American School Food Service Association (ASFSA)
America's Second Harvest
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
Bread for the World
Children's Defense Fund
Coalition on Human Needs
Congressional Hunger Center

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Education Association (NEA)
National Milk Producers Federation
National PTA
National WIC Association
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
RESULTS
The Produce for Better Health Foundation
Union for Reform Judaism
United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association
Volunteers of America

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