



May 10, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee
on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee
on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Washington, D.C. 20510

CC: Chairman Corey Booker, Senator Mike Bruan

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

The Alliance to End Hunger deeply appreciates the actions Congress has taken thus far to assist the 18 million adults and as many as 11 million children in the U.S. struggling with hunger, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Further, the Alliance applauds the recent child nutrition provisions included in the Administration's American Families Plan that makes welcomed investments in Summer EBT, the Community Eligibility Provision, access to school meals and incentives for schools to offer nutritious meals.

Child nutrition reauthorization is another critical opportunity to help families recover from COVID-19. It must be recognized that some communities are struggling with hunger more than others. Black and Latino adults are more than twice (16 percent) as likely as white adults (6 percent) to report that their households do not have enough to eat.² Congress can continue to alleviate hunger and address the existing inequities by strengthening and improving access to child nutrition programs. The Alliance to End Hunger supports the following policy recommendations to ensure more children and families have the resources they need to thrive:

- **Summer and Afterschool Meals**

Summer EBT: Permanently expand and authorize the Summer EBT program nationwide (currently a demonstration program in a handful of states) and make it available to families during school breaks to supplement their household food budgets.

Expand Eligibility: Address summer nutrition access gaps by expanding eligibility through the following provisions included in the bipartisan Summer Meals Act: lower the area eligibility threshold from 50% to 40%; streamline the afterschool and summer

¹ Adult data is according to Census Pulse data March 17-29, 2021 and the child data is according to Census Pulse data March 3-15, 2021 as reported by Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [Tracking the COVID-19 Recession's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships](#), accessed April 20, 2021.

² According to Census Pulse data March 17-29, 2021 as reported by Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [Tracking the COVID-19 Recession's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships](#), accessed April 20, 2021.

meals programs so sponsors can feed children year-round; provides grants to address transportation barriers; and allows sites to serve a third meal to children.

Service-model Flexibility: Building on successful models used during COVID-19 response, permanently authorize a “non-congregate” option and allow the distribution of multiple meals at one time in rural and hard-to-reach communities as well as in cases of extreme weather or emergencies.

- **School Meals**

Expand the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP): As proposed in the American Families Plan, increase the number of low-income children that have access to the well-documented benefits of free school meals through CEP by increasing the identified student percentage multiplier, making CEP financially viable for more schools, and by lowering the eligibility threshold for elementary schools.

Expand Medicaid Direct Certification: Improve access to school meals and eliminate unnecessary paperwork by expanding nationwide the use of Medicaid data for direct certification and provide for direct certification improvement grants to states.

Eliminate the Reduced-Price Category: Simplify the school meals programs and support students from financially strapped working families by eliminating the reduced-price category.

- **Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**

Expand Eligibility: Address coverage gaps for postpartum mothers and children not yet enrolled in school by expanding eligibility consistent with the bipartisan Wise Investment in our Children Act (WIC Act).

Streamline Certifications: Build on lessons learned during the pandemic to permit telehealth options and onboard new families via video or telephone options, extend certifications periods, and enhance coordination with healthcare providers to facilitate greater access to WIC services.

Modernize Program Services: Invest in WIC technologies to deliver nutrition education and breastfeeding support via telehealth options, permit benefit redemption through online shopping, further integrate with other healthcare services, and streamline transactions at farmers markets.

- **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**

Expand and strengthen the CACFP program. Address coverage gaps through recommendations consistent with the Access to Healthy Food for Young Children Act which proposes to enhance benefits, expand eligibility, streamline program requirements, and reduce administrative burdens.

- **Farm to School**

Expand and strengthen the USDA Farm to School Grant Program: Program expansion should advance equity by including requirements to reach underserved communities, as well as engage beginning, veteran, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Farm to school activities help students develop healthy eating habits and expands market opportunities to support family farmers and ranchers.

- **Access to Nutrition during Disasters and Public Emergencies**

Allow the USDA secretary authority to issue waiver flexibilities during disasters and public emergencies. To quickly respond to nutrition gaps for low-income families caused by closure of typical school and out-of-school-time meal programs due to disasters and public emergencies, allow the secretary to issue waivers to provide flexibilities to program operators to ensure meals can reach children in need.

Ensuring equity is built into the child nutrition programs must be at the forefront of proposed child nutrition legislation and implementation. There are significant opportunities to achieve racial equity and reduce the risk of hunger among people of color. The above recommendations work to build more equity within the child nutrition programs by enhancing eligibility and bolstering benefits for families and communities that have been consistently disenfranchised. Child nutrition programs could further reduce inequality through encouraging greater tribal sovereignty for operating the school and summer meals programs; ensuring that WIC staff are representative of the communities they serve; and adding more culturally relevant foods on the list of WIC-approved purchases.

We are encouraged by the bipartisan urgency demonstrated by the Administration and Congress in tackling the critical needs of families who are struggling to put food on the table during the COVID19 pandemic. Child nutrition reauthorization is an overdue opportunity to enhance benefits, increase access to healthy meals, and address the disproportionate impact hunger has on children of color.

Respectfully,



Eric Mitchell
Executive Director
Alliance to End Hunger

The Alliance to End Hunger is a coalition of nearly 100 members—corporations, non-profits, faith-based organizations, universities, foundations, international organizations, and individuals—with a shared conviction that addressing hunger is essential.