

September 28, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
S-221 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-222 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20512

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

The undersigned are excited and hopeful that Congress will enact a bold Build Back Better Act, making historic investments that will lift low-income families out of poverty, alleviate hunger while improving nutrition, and address racial disparities in the United States. We applaud the House for its quick action in proposing significant investments toward advancing specific anti-hunger and poverty provisions in the Build Back Better Act and we urge the House and Senate to maintain these critical provisions. The undersigned organizations urge you to pass the following key nutrition, anti-poverty, and health-equity provisions:

Expand Summer EBT nationwide and authorize \$50 million in implementation grants to address a long-standing and significant gap in child access to nutrition that exists when school is not in session. Many low-income families face barriers preventing them from participating in traditional congregate summer meal service sites. According to USDA's evaluation of the Summer EBT demonstration project, the additional cash benefit successfully decreased food insecurity and increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains among children.¹ Summer EBT gives families flexibility and communities another tool to address childhood hunger in the summer.

Expand the Community Eligibility Provision by increasing the CEP-specific multiplier that determines the federal reimbursement schools receive for meals served from 1.6 to 2.5, lowering the eligibility threshold to 25 percent, and allowing states the option to participate state-wide to ensure more children have access to healthy school meals at no cost. Community eligibility is proven to increase participation in both school breakfast and lunch and reduce time spent on administrative tasks.² Community eligibility strengthens the financial health

¹ United States Department of Agriculture, [Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children \(SEBTC\) Demonstration: Summary Report](#) (May 2016). Accessed July 23, 2021.

² Logan, Christopher W., Patty Connor, Eleanor L. Harvill, Joseph Harknes, Hiren Nisar, Amy Checkoway, Laura R. Peck, Azim Shivji, Edwin Bein, Marjorie Levin, and Ayesha Enver. Community Eligibility Provision Evaluation. Project

of school meal programs because there is no longer a risk of students accruing unpaid school meal fees. Further, schools are not faced with the difficult task of denying children school meals because of unpaid school meal debt. Increasing the federal reimbursement and expanding eligibility will make it easier for high-poverty schools to participate in this essential program.

Expand Medicaid direct certification nationwide. Improve access to free and reduced-price school meals for eligible children through eliminating unnecessary paperwork by allowing all states to conduct direct certification using Medicaid data.

Provide \$634 million to launch a healthy food incentive demonstration and \$500 million for school kitchen equipment grants. Enhancing reimbursements for school meals served that exceed current school meal standards will ensure children have better access to nutrition at school—setting students up for long-term success in and outside of the classroom. Schools across the country require major investments in their kitchen infrastructure as they work to improve the quality and nutrition of the food they serve.

Provide \$1.3 billion in funding for Older Americans Act (OAA) programs, like Meals on Wheels. New supplemental federal funding will assist senior nutrition programs in continuing to meet the unprecedented demand for nutritious meals for older adults. It will also allow investment in critical infrastructure and technology, making it possible for local organizations to improve and acquire the crucial assets needed to sustain operations, such as kitchen equipment, delivery vehicles and safe, accessible buildings and facilities. Enacting this funding is vital to support the health, well-being and dignity of older adults both today and for years to come.

Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit and extend the expanded provisions of the Child Tax Credit. Expanding tax credits will provide greatly need relief for low-and-middle-income families to end the cycle of poverty. Better access to nutrition alone will not solve the root causes of poverty and hunger.

Maintain proposed funding for maternal health provisions included by the Committee on Energy and Commerce. If enacted, these critical provisions will begin to address our nation's maternal mortality crisis, which disproportionately impacts Black and Indigenous people. These investments will address health outcomes and healthcare access disparities through ensuring that pregnant and postpartum people have access to critical healthcare, nutrition programs, and community-based supports.

In addition, we hope Congress will consider including additional nutrition investments by providing funds to ensure local emergency hunger relief organizations can serve community members in need of food assistance.

Throughout the pandemic we have witnessed how millions of families have been left behind. Today we are at a critical moment where the U.S. can choose to support a more equitable recovery or one that continues to exacerbate the disparities and continues to leave behind the underserved communities that have experienced significant hardship. We thank Congress for its continued commitment to eradicating poverty, hunger, and racial inequities and are excited to see these critical provisions move across the finish line through the Build Back Better Act.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

1,000 Days
A Place at the Table
Alliance to End Hunger
Azimuth Diversified Fund, LLC
Black Women's Health Imperative
Bread for the World
CareCentrix
Church World Service
DoorDash
Edesia
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Feeding America
FoodFinder
GIVN Goods
Islamic Relief USA
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Meals on Wheels America
MEANS Database
National WIC Association
Nuro
Poetry X Hunger
RESULTS
Rise Against Hunger
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)
Share Our Strength
Society of St. Andrew
Souper Bowl of Caring

State and Local Organizations:

Alabama Food Bank Association
Arizona Food Bank Network
Beyond Hunger (Illinois)
Children's Hunger Alliance (Ohio)
Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger
Community Food Advocates (New York)
Des Moines Area Religious Council
Food Bank of East Alabama
Hall Hunger Initiative (Ohio)
Hunger Free Vermont
Hunger Impact Partners (Minnesota)
Indy Hunger Network (Indiana)
Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes (Michigan)
March of Dimes New York
New Hampshire Hunger Solutions
NourishKC (Missouri)