

January 10, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
2308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on
Appropriations
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Appropriations
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwomen Murray and Granger, Vice Chair Collins, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

We, the undersigned institutions, are writing to urge you to fully invest in federal nutrition programs in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget. The suite of federal food and nutrition programs serves to improve food security for our nation's most vulnerable community members, as well as enhance the prosperity of families and communities everywhere.

The need to address food access and nutrition gaps is more urgent than ever. While inflation is cooling, the cost of living remains high. Child poverty rates more than doubled from 2021 to 2022. Concurrently, household food insecurity increased from 10.2 percent in 2021 to 12.8 percent in 2022 including 3.3 million households with children experiencing food insecurity. Additionally, nearly 1 in 7 seniors were living in poverty in 2022 – a significant increase from 2021 levels – and 10 million seniors report worrying about having sufficient food.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is ominously underfunded, threatening to place eligible new and expecting mothers and young children on waitlists for nutrition assistance. Historically, there has been bipartisan commitment to serve every eligible family that seeks to participate in the program. This would be the first time in 25 years that WIC has not been able to serve all eligible participants. WIC is projected to potentially serve more than 7 million participants in 2024, but both the House and Senate funding proposals fail to provide adequate funds to maintain projected participation, potentially forcing states to reduce WIC participation by about 2 million young children and pregnant and postpartum mothers nationwide by September 2024. One in three households headed by single mothers are food insecure. WIC remains a valuable resource for low-income families that struggle to make ends meet and put food on the table. In addition, WIC advances equity by closing racial hunger and nutrition gaps.

Sadly, WIC agencies across the nation have begun to consider cost-cutting measures, including scaling back outreach and cross-enrollment efforts, clinic hours, and staffing. WIC is not only in jeopardy of imposing waiting lists, but the House funding levels would drastically cut the fresh fruits and vegetable cash value benefit by 56-70%, jeopardizing the recent increase of vital fruit and vegetable consumption by WIC mothers and their children. At a time when maternal mortality rates in the U.S. are high and increasing at a more rapid rate than any other high-income country, addressing social determinants of health like food and nutrition security is paramount.

Deep federal funding cuts being threatened in FY 2024 appropriations bills would also cause direct harm to older adults who rely on and need nutrition services. As is, 73% of local programs delivering Older Americans Act Title III-C Nutrition Programs report facing higher demand for home-delivered meals than before the pandemic. Moreover, one in three has a waiting list, forcing seniors to wait, on average, three months for vital meals. Research has demonstrated the positive impacts of these programs on the health and well-being of individuals 60 and older while also resulting in cost savings for taxpayers. This program, backed by a history of bipartisan support, fosters a successful public-private partnership that enables the delivery of more than 251 million nutritious meals annually to older adults facing hunger and isolation and is deserving of increased federal resources this year.

The current situation is causing a strain on charitable and emergency feeding organizations that assist families struggling to make ends meet. Investing in commodity safety net programs such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) will support food banks, food pantries, and other emergency feeding organizations that provide nutritious meals and groceries to their neighbors in geographically and socially disadvantaged areas.

If enacted, proposed funding cuts to date will impair the ability of state agencies, food banks and other providers to sufficiently serve their community members. All federal nutrition programs play a crucial role in making sure food and nutrition security is addressed. Adequately funding these programs to meet the anticipated need in FY 2024 is critical at this time of high food insecurity. Families across the country should not have to bear the brunt of underfunded nutrition programs.

These vital nutrition programs support our nation's nutrition safety net and provide all vulnerable community members—from infants to seniors—the opportunity to have positive nutrition and health outcomes despite their income. It is important for all nutrition programs to be adequately funded, without offsetting funding from other nutrition programs. A cut to any nutrition program not only increases the risk of food insecurity for marginalized communities but also increases the burden on other nutrition programs as they are forced to fill the gap.

We urge appropriators to work in a bipartisan way to fully invest in funding federal nutrition programs to address vital food security needs in advance of the January 19th funding deadline.

Respectfully,

National Organizations/Companies

1,000 Days, an initiative of FHI360
Advocates for Community Health
Alliance to End Hunger
Bread for the World
Christian Connections for International Health
Coalition on Human Needs
Congressional Hunger Center
DoorDash
Feeding America
FoodFinder
Islamic Relief USA

March of Dimes
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Meals on Wheels America
MEANS Database
National Commodity Supplemental Food Program
National WIC Association
Outreach Inc.
Poetry X Hunger
RESULTS
Rise Against Hunger
Save the Children
Share Our Strength
Tackle Hunger: Home of the Souper Bowl of Caring
The Farmlink Project
The Root Cause Coalition
Horizons, A Family Service Alliance
Shipt

State/Local Organizations/Companies

Arizona Food Bank Network
Berks Encore
Beyond Hunger
Blue Skies Consultation
Buffalo Prenatal Perinatal Network
CAA-Meals On Wheels
Children's Hunger Alliance
Citymeals on Wheels
Community Food Advocates
Des Moines Area Religious Council (DMARC)
Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center
Feeding Charlotte
Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana
Hall Hunger Initiative
Hunger Free Colorado
Hunger Free Vermont
Idaho Hunger Relief Task Force
Indy Hunger Network
Interfaith Health & Support Services
Iowa Hunger Coalition
Jewish Family & Children's Service
Jewish Federation of Ocean County

Macomb County Office of Senior Services
Meals on Wheels of Central IN
Meals on Wheels of Solano County
Meals on Wheels San Antonio
Meals on Wheels Wake County
Mobile Meals of Toledo
Montco Anti-Hunger Network
Mooresburg Community Association
Northern Ocean Habitat for Humanity
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee
Senior Citizens Of Holt County Inc
Sojourner
St. Vincent de Paul Indianapolis
The Patachou Foundation
Timothy Rice Estate and Elder Law Firm
WHEAT