



December 11, 2013

Hon. Barbara Mikulski, Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
S-128 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Richard C. Shelby, Ranking
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
S-146A Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Harold Rogers, Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-307 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Nita. M. Lowey, Ranking
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. David Pryor, Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, FDA, & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
129 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Roy Blunt, Ranking
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, FDA, & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
190 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Robert Aderholt, Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, FDA, & Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
2362A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Sam Farr, Ranking
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, FDA, & Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski, Ranking Member Shelby, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Blunt, Chairman Aderholt, and Ranking Member Farr:

The **National WIC Association (NWA)** writes to urge your full support of funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) for fiscal year 2014 at \$6.79 billion. This budget request is predicated on an anticipated per participant food package cost of approximately \$44.65 to serve roughly 8.6 million mothers and young children.

This \$6.79 billion request includes funding to replenish the WIC contingency fund at \$200 million; \$60 million for breastfeeding peer counselors and \$30 million for management information systems (MIS) and electronic benefit transfer systems (EBT); \$5 million for research and evaluation studies; \$11 million for federal oversight and program integrity; and \$14 million for infrastructure and technical assistance. We urge your full support of these provisions.

While dire consequences were predicted at the outset of sequestration and the federal government shutdown for WIC, a combination of actions and influences – a) hiring freezes, b) staff attrition, c) clinic consolidations and closings (all of which will ultimately have a negative

impact on quality of services), d) careful management of food costs by State WIC Program administrators, e) relatively low food cost inflation, f) unexpectedly flat participation, and the g) availability of critical contingency funds – allowed for sufficient carryover funds in this fiscal year to avert Program closure during the federal government shutdown, and minimize sequester impacts. That said, sequestration and the federal government shutdown were clearly not without negative consequences to WIC.

As uncertainty continues to affect WIC administration, placing vulnerable mothers and young children at potential risk of loss of critical WIC nutrition services, it is absolutely essential that the WIC contingency fund be replenished to an amount no less than \$200 million.

With respect to breastfeeding peer counseling funding, we urge you to allocate the full amount of \$60 million to peer counseling services rather than funding the incentive award program of \$5 million designed to help states achieve improved breastfeeding outcomes. Funding the full amount for peer counseling services are particularly important given one infant formula manufacturer's (Abbott) decision to remove products from state infant formula cost containment rebate programs. It is estimated that \$13 billion in health care costs would be saved per year if 90% of U.S. infants were breastfed exclusively for six months. Adequately investing in and supporting breastfeeding in WIC would potentially reduce the need for WIC to purchase infant formula.

Abbott's decision could have adverse impacts of the overall success of the rebate program, forcing appropriators to consider the need for additional funding for WIC to make up for a potential resource shortfall, or worse, require affected WIC programs losing rebate revenue to resort to waitlisting postpartum women and young children. We urge the Committees to direct the Food & Nutrition Service to report to Congress on the fiscal and participation impacts of Abbott's recent decision.

We also urge full funding of \$30 million for MIS/EBT to allow State WIC Programs to meet the 2020 mandate for full EBT implementation. Successful national implementation is necessary to avoid the unfortunate program integrity challenges that WIC experienced in Georgia, California, and most recently in Louisiana. EBT provides WIC Program administrators with real time assessments of food costs allowing them to immediately identify fraudulent vendor pricing practices and over-charges. For the same reasons, NWA urges \$11 million in federal oversight and program integrity funding.

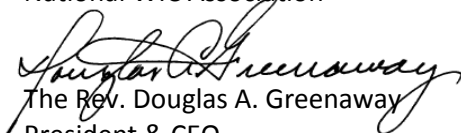
NWA urges \$5 million in funding for research and the essential evaluation of WIC service outcomes. This funding is critical to assist policymakers in determining the effectiveness of WIC. Failure to fund research and evaluation studies leaves policymakers without the appropriate tools to make necessary funding decisions. NWA also urges appropriators to provide \$14 million in essential infrastructure and technical assistance funding.

Finally, we urge appropriators to oppose efforts to alter the landscape of foods available in the science-based WIC food package. These decisions must be left to nutrition scientists and not Congress. Indeed, the food package is up for review in 2015. Improving the nutritional health

and well-being of vulnerable mothers and young children led Congress to create WIC nearly 40 years ago. Undermining that mission by allowing Congress to insert itself into science-based decisions is counterintuitive and can only result in other challenges to the science-based integrity of the WIC food package.

In the spirit of WIC: Strengthening Families for 40 Years, we urge your full support of these requests.

Kind Regards,
National WIC Association


The Rev. Douglas A. Greenaway
President & CEO