

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 17, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

Ahead of the September 30 deadline to sustain federal funding, we urge you to take action in the Continuing Resolution to extend increased issuance of fruits and vegetables under the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Over 4.7 million children, pregnant women, and postpartum women in all 50 States received enhanced benefits over the summer months and are at risk of seeing a steep drop in benefits that would leave families with access to only \$2.25 per week to purchase produce for their children.

The targeted increase of WIC benefits is a common-sense strategy that provides additional support to new parents struggling to navigate the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, opens new markets for producers adapting to an altered supply chain, and invests in the health of America's next generation. During the summer, families received \$35 per month, per participant for fruits and vegetables – more than triple the usual amount, resulting in increased purchases at retail grocery locations and greater access to a diversity of healthy foods for young children. An extension of this heightened benefit is a necessary step to enhance WIC's work to prevent childhood obesity and especially now to blunt accelerated childhood obesity rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the average 5-year-old reporting a 12.5% weight gain during the pandemic.¹

The short-term WIC benefit increase is rooted in years of evidence that support WIC's role as an intervention to address the chronic diet-related conditions that burden the nation's healthcare expenditures. WIC has a long history of generating cost savings to Medicaid, with every dollar invested in WIC returning about \$2.48 in medical costs.² WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit, along with access to additional healthy foods, is associated with a nationwide reduction in childhood obesity rates among enrolled toddlers.³ In January 2017, an independent scientific panel of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) called for a significant increase to WIC's fruit and vegetable voucher (or, Cash Value Benefit) as one of the most effective steps to bring the diets of WIC-enrolled toddlers more in line with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs).⁴

A bipartisan effort – led by Rep. Kim Schrier (D-WA) and the late Rep. Ron Wright (R-TX) – highlighted the importance of enacting this long-delayed change as a strategy to address the COVID-related hunger crisis. In July 2021, the House of Representatives approved a fiscal year 2022 Agriculture Appropriations bill that included adequate funding to sustain the heightened benefit; similar levels have been proposed in the Senate. State and local providers cannot wait for a broader deal on federal spending, as the benefit is set to expire on September 30, and families will go without the additional benefit unless Congress takes immediate action in the Continuing Resolution.

We thank you for consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

/s/
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

/s/
Karen Bass
Member of Congress

/s/
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

/s/
Carolyn Bourdeaux
Member of Congress

/s/
Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress

/s/
Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress



Jennifer González Colón
Member of Congress

/s/
Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

/s/
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

/s/
Jason Crow
Member of Congress

/s/
Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

/s/
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

/s/
Bill Foster
Member of Congress

/s/
Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

/s/
Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

/s/
Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

/s/
Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

/s/
Al Lawson
Member of Congress

/s/
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Mike Levin
Member of Congress

/s/
Andy Levin
Member of Congress

/s/
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Grace Meng
Member of Congress

/s/
Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

/s/
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

/s/
Marie Newman
Member of Congress

/s/
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

/s/
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

/s/
C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/
Michael F.Q. San Nicolas
Member of Congress

/s/
Adam Smith
Member of Congress

/s/
Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

/s/
Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress

/s/
Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress

/s/

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

/s/

Nikema Williams
Member of Congress

¹ See Woolford SJ, Sidell M, Li X, et al (2021) Changes in Body Mass Index Among Children and Adolescents During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *JAMA*. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2021.15036>.

² Nianogo RA, Wang MC, Basturo-Davila R, Nobari TZ, Prelip M, Arah OA, Whaley SE (2019) Economic evaluation of California prenatal participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to prevent preterm birth. *Preventive Medicine* 124:42-49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2019.04.011>.

³ Pan L, Blanck H, Park S, Galuska DA, Freedman DS, Potter A, Peterson R (2019) State-Specific Prevalence of Obesity Among Children Aged 2-4 Enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children – United States, 2010-2016. *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 68(46):1057-1061. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6846a3.htm?s_cid=mm6846a3_w.

⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice. National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.