

September 19, 2021

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

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

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

As frontline providers of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and community health partners invested in the long-term health of children, we urge Congress to include an anomaly in the continuing resolution that would extend the WIC benefit increase through September 2022. The WIC benefit increase is an effective measure that enhances access to fruits and vegetables for young children, effectively counters rising childhood obesity rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, and creates new markets and strengthens purchases for producers and rural grocers.

For nearly fifty years, WIC has worked to support positive birth and early childhood outcomes that give children a healthy start. The establishment in 2009 of a fruit and vegetable benefit, or Cash Value Benefit, helped introduce greater variety in children's diets, increased stocking of fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods, and brought obesity rates for WIC-enrolled toddlers in line with the general child population. In 2017, a review by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) cautioned that the fruit and vegetable benefit remains too low to support even half of recommended dietary intake and urged a higher value, especially to support children's nutritional needs.

Rooted in independent scientific advice, increasing WIC fruit and vegetable benefit has been an effective strategy to support children's healthy development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, obesity rates among children are rising at alarming rates, with a 12.5% increase on average for a 5-year-old child in the general population. WIC children had only received \$2.25 per week for fruits and vegetables – the short-term increase has tripled that value to ensure more consistent access to healthy foods, especially as food costs are rising. 4.7 million children, pregnant women, and postpartum mothers will now face a steep decline in fruit and vegetable benefits on September 30 if Congress does not act, with monthly benefit levels decreasing by approximately \$25 per participant.

Families with young children have increasingly turned to WIC support during the COVID-19 pandemic, with an 8.3% nationwide increase in child participation since February 2020. In addition to increased access to fruits and vegetables, WIC's ability to serve a greater share of eligible children means that more families will be connected with healthcare, immunizations, dental care, and other vital public health supports. An abrupt decrease in WIC benefits could have impacts on WIC's reach, diminishing the impacts of WIC's hard-earned progress in supporting children during the pandemic.

Extending WIC's benefit increase for fruit and vegetables is a win-win for WIC shoppers, retailers, and producers. WIC's built-in capacity to partner with vendor partners to increase access to fruits and vegetables is a constructive strategy to avert further economic disruption to the food supply chain, bolster transactions at smaller vendors and rural grocers, and lift up the local farm economy by enhancing redemptions at farmers markets and farm stands. Without an extension in the continuing resolution, a decrease in WIC's fruit and vegetable benefits will have economic impacts not just for WIC families, but also for rural grocers and farmers that closely partner with WIC to meet the needs of their communities.

As the United States emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must continue to prioritize the health, well-being, and future life success of the nation's children. A yearlong extension of WIC's benefit increase is a smart investment in the long-term health of America's next generation. We urge Congress to include an anomaly that extends the WIC benefit increase in the continuing resolution.

Sincerely,

Alabama Arise, AL

Alabama Grocers Association, AL

Alaska Association of WIC Coordinators, AK

Resource Center for Parents & Children, AK

Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation, AK

Arkansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, AR

American Samoa WIC Program, AS

Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, AZ

Arizona Local Agency WIC Association, AZ

Arizona Food Marketing Alliance, AZ

Canyon Pediatrics & Family WIC, AZ

Gila River Indian Community WIC Program, AZ

Mountain Park Health Center, AZ

Navajo WIC Nutrition Program, AZ

The Food Industry Safety Measures, AZ

White Mountain Apache Tribe WIC Program, AZ

California Giant Berry Farms, CA

California WIC Association, CA

California Chapter 1, American Academy of Pediatrics, CA

Camino Health Center – WIC Program, CA

County of Sonoma WIC Program, CA

City of Long Beach Department of Health and Human Service, CA

Claremont Presbyterian Children's Center, CA

Commerce Realty, CA

Community Bridges of Santa Cruz County, CA

Delta Health Care WIC, CA

DHS Los Angeles County, H. Claude Hudson CHC, CA

Families Together of Orange County Community Health Center, CA

Fresh Innovations California, LLC, CA

Glenn County WIC, CA

Heluna Health, CA

Interfaith Food Center, CA

Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, CA

Maternal and Child Health Access, CA

Mother's Nutritional Center, Inc., CA

Nourish California, CA
Pro Citrus Network, CA
Prime Time Nutrition, CA
PHFE WIC, CA
Populous Consulting, CA
PPOSBC, CA
RUHS Public Health, CA
San Diego County Breastfeeding Coalition, CA
San Francisco AIDS Foundation, CA
San Joaquin County Public Health Services WIC, CA
University of Southern California, CA
USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, CA
WIC WNA, CA
4Earth Farms, LLC, CA
Bent County Public Health, CO
Boulder County WIC, CO
Denver WIC, CO
Garfield County Public Health, CO
JPMA, Inc., CO
Mesa County Public Health, CO
Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment, WIC, CO
San Juan Basin Public Health, CO
Weld County WIC, CO
TVCCA, CT
DE Food Industry Association, DE
Orange County Public Schools – Food and Nutrition Services, FL
Tangelo, FL
GA Food Industry Association, GA
Hawaii Children's Action Network Speaks!, HI
WCCHC, HI
WIC Program, Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children, HI
WIC, Waimānalo Health Center, HI
Capital City Fruit, Co., IA
Community Health Care, Inc., IA
Marion County Public Health WIC Program, IA
Polk and Dallas County WIC Program, IA
Pottawattamie County WIC, IA
Eastern Idaho Public Health WIC Program, ID
Southwest District Health, ID
SCPHD-WIC, ID
Southeastern Idaho Public Health WIC, ID
Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, IL
Kendall County Health Department, IL
The FruitGuys, IL
Will County Health Department, IL
Winnebago County Health Department, IL
Indiana Health Centers, Inc., IN
MCCOY (Marion County Commission on Youth, Inc.), IN
Marion County WIC, IN
New Hope Services, INC., IN
Flinthills Community Health Center, KS
Miami Co WIC, KS
Neosho County Health Dept., KS

Kentucky Grocers & Convenience Store Association, KY

Crescent City Family Services, Inc., LA

Boston Children's Hospital, MA

Fall River, MA WIC Program @ Health First Family Care Center, MA

Harbor Health Services, MA

HealthFirst Family Care Center, Inc WIC Nutrition Program, MA

Massachusetts Association of WIC Directors, MA

Massachusetts Food Association, MA

Maryland Retailers Association, MD

Maryland WIC Association (WAM), MD

State of Maryland - Charles County Department of Health, MD

Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, ME

DHHS CDC WIC, ME

RSU 14, ME

Western Maine Community Action, ME

InterCare community Health Network WIC Program, MI

Michigan Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics, MI

North Bay Produce, Inc., MI

OLHSA WIC, MI

Washtenaw County WIC, MI

Hennepin County WIC, MN

La Sueur County WIC Program, MN

Minnesota Grocers Association, MN

Robinson Fresh, MN

State of Minnesota, MN

Todd County Health and Human Services, MN

Carneys Supermarket Inc., MO

City of St. Joseph Health Department WIC, MO

Family Care Health Center, MO

Missouri Grocers Association, MO

Old Tyme Produce Inc., MO

Ozark Empire Grocers Association, MO

Rozier's Food Centre, MO

Randolph County WIC, MO

Woods Supermarket, MO

W.H. Koch Co., Inc., MO

G.A. Carmichael Family Health Center, MS

Greater Meridian Health Clinic, Inc., MS

Healthy by Design Coalition, MT

Billings Backpack Meals and Teen Pantry Programs, MT

Flathead WIC Department, Kalispell, MT

Nutrition for the Future, MT

Carolinas Food Industry Council, NC

Compare Foods, NC

Fairvalue Grocery Stores, NC

L&M Companies, NC

Lowes Foods, NC

Montgomery County Health Dept. WIC Program, NC

Piggly Wiggly Central Business Office, NC

Community Action Partnership of North Dakota, Fargo, ND

Custer Health WIC Program, ND

Ehrens Consulting, ND

ON THE MOVE at City County Health District,
ND

Charles Drew WIC, NE

Community Action Partnership of MID-NE, WIC,
NE

Family Health Services Inc. WIC Program, NE

Nebraska Grocery Industry Association, NE

Nebraska WIC Program, NE

Nebraska WIC Association, NE

New Hampshire Grocers Association, NH

New Jersey Food Council, NJ

Passaic WIC Program, NJ

New Mexico Department of Health – WIC, NM

Community Health Alliance WIC, NV

Catholic Charities WIC, NY

Cortland County Community Action Program,
Inc., NY

D’Arrigo New York, NY

Delaware Opportunities Inc., NY

Eastside WIC Program, NY

Food Industry Alliance of New York State, NY

Ryan Health, NY

SPCC- Society for the Protection and Care of
Children, NY

S. Katzman Produce, NY

Tops Markets, NY

WIC Association of NYS, Inc., NY

Belmont County WIC, OH

Butler County Educational Service Center, OH

Columbus Public Health, OH

Cuyahoga County WIC Program, OH

DNO Inc., OH

Hamilton County WIC Program, OH

HP Nemenz Food Stores, OH

Preble County JFS, OH

Produce Packaging, Inc., OH

Cherokee Nation WIC Program, OK

C & H RV Park, OK

Oklahoma Grocers Association, OK

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation WIC Program, OK

WCD-WIC, OK

Clatsop County WIC Program, OR

Columbia Health Services, OR

Coos Health & Wellness WIC, OR

Harney County Health Department, OR

Jefferson County Public Health, OR

Malheur County Oregon WIC Program, OR

Multnomah County Health Department, OR

Our Children Oregon, OR

American Mushroom Institute, PA

PA Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics,
PA

Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association, PA

The Foundation for Delaware County WIC
Program, PA

CCAP, RI

Meeting Street, RI

West Elmwood Housing Development
Corporation, RI

BJHCHS- WIC, SC
Floco Foods, SC
L&R Sherman, LLC, SC
Piggly Wiggly #194, SC
W Lee Flowers, SC
SD Department of Health WIC Program, SD
Tennessee Grocers & Convenience Store Association, TN
Collin County Health Care WIC, TX
DiMare, TX
Driscoll Children's Hospital WIC Program, TX
Harris County Public Health, TX
San Patricio County, TX
South Plains Community Action Association, Inc., TX
Texas Association of Local WIC Directors, TX
Texas International Produce Association, TX
WCCHD WIC, TX
Whole Kids Foundation, TX
WIC Cedar Park, TX
Williamson County and Cities Health District, TX
UT Health WIC Program, TX
Victoria County Public Health Dept.- WIC Program, TX
Vida Y Salud Health SYS, INC., TX
Utah County WIC - Orem WIC Clinic Director, UT
Utah Food Industry Association, UT
Virginia Breastfeeding Advisory Committee, VA
Virginia Breastfeeding Coalition, VA
Hunger Free Vermont, VT
Community Action of Skagit County, WA
Chelan-Douglas Health District, WA
Cowlitz Family Health Center-WIC, WA
Fiarchild Air Force Base WIC Program, WA
King County Public Health WIC at Skyway Healthpoint, WA
Island County Public Health WIC, WA
Lincoln County WIC, WA
Mattawa Community Medical Clinic, WA
Nutrition First, WA
Pacific Coast Fruit Company, WA
Public Health – Seattle King County, WA
Spokane Tribe of Indians, WA
TCCH, WA
WIC of Okanogan County at Family Health Centers, WA
Whidbey NAS WIC, WA
Whitman County, WA State WIC Program, WA
United General District 304 WIC Program, WA
Bay Area WIC Program, WI
Dodge County WIC, WI
Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc., WI
Wisconsin American Academy of Pediatrics, WI
Wisconsin WIC Association (WWA), WI
Trempealeau Buffalo County WIC, WI
West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, WV
Albany County WIC, WY
Northwest Horticultural Council, WY