

**FRIENDS OF THE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM
FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)
c/o National WIC Association**

January 21, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee

Re: Extending the WIC Benefit Bump in FY 2022 Omnibus

Dear Chair Leahy, Ranking Member Shelby, Chair DeLauro, and Ranking Member Granger:

Since April 2021, over 4.7 million participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) have received enhanced benefits to purchase additional fruits and vegetables. The undersigned organizations – a diverse coalition of maternal and public health organizations, children’s advocates, agriculture partners, and retail and industry stakeholders – thank you for your work to extend the WIC benefit bump through March 31 under the continuing resolutions, ensuring minimal disruption to benefit issuance. **With enhanced WIC benefits set to expire on March 31, this coalition urges Congress to negotiate an omnibus package before the February 18 deadline and include an extension of the WIC benefit bump through September 30, 2022.**

The WIC benefit bump is an historic, science-based investment that strengthens our nation’s nutrition security, counters rising childhood obesity rates during the pandemic, and creates new markets for local retailers and producers. In 2009, reflecting longstanding recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the U.S. Department of Agriculture introduced a Cash Value Benefit (CVB) for WIC participants to purchase fruits and vegetables. Although WIC’s fruit and vegetable benefit only amounted to \$9/month for children and \$11/month for women, this action led to increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, greater dietary variety for children, increased stocking of fruits and vegetables in retailers in low-income neighborhoods, and a decline in childhood obesity rates among WIC-enrolled toddlers.

The September 30 and December 3 continuing resolutions further aligned the WIC fruit and vegetable benefit with nutrition science by increasing the value of the benefit to 50% of recommended intake per month, equating to \$24/month for children, \$43/month for pregnant and postpartum participants, and \$47/month for breastfeeding participants. Initial data confirms that enhanced value is resulting in increased consumption of fruits and vegetables. State WIC Agencies report that the enhanced benefit levels result in increased variety of fruit and vegetable purchases, allowing parents to introduce new fruits and vegetables to their children, such as seasonal, tropical, and stone fruits and root vegetables, at a critical time for the development of children’s lifelong taste preferences. The benefits increase also supports families in budgeting for higher fruit and vegetables prices and encourages sustained WIC participation by children as they grow, ensuring more consistent access to nutritious foods and healthier outcomes before entering school.

In a survey of 6,500 WIC participants across five State WIC Agencies, 83% of participants identified that the baseline fruit and vegetable benefit was not enough, but only 26% of participants echoed that sentiment after the WIC benefit bump was in place (NWA/Nutrition Policy Institute/Pepperdine survey, Sept.-Nov. 2021). The WIC benefit bump is popular among all Americans, with more than three-quarters of likely voters (76%) in favor of increasing federal funding for WIC to provide more healthy and nutritious foods to participating families, including 62% of likely Republican voters, 76% of likely independent voters, and 90% of likely Democratic voters (ALG Research/McLaughlin & Associates, Sept. 2021).

Extending the WIC benefit bump not only supports families' access and consumption of healthy foods, but it simultaneously invests in local economies, fueling retail transactions and creating new markets for fruit and vegetable producers. The versatility of the WIC benefit bolsters transactions even when local retailers may have limited or irregular stock, and the added value strengthens WIC participants' purchasing power at a time when fruit and vegetable prices are increasing more than any other food group (Consumer Price Index, Dec. 2021). All elements of the WIC food supply chain benefit from longer-term certainty about the enhanced benefit levels, with distribution channels and participant-oriented communication having to nimbly adjust as short-term extensions were granted in the continuing resolutions, at times incurring significant administrative expense or staff time.

WIC providers and participants, retailers, and producers all need clarity that the WIC benefit bump will be sustained for the remainder of the fiscal year, enabling 4.7 million WIC participants to build more robust and nutritious shopping patterns that will deliver healthier outcomes for the next generation. We urge Congress to come together and negotiate an omnibus package that provides the U.S. Department of Agriculture with the funding and authority to extend the WIC benefit bump through September 30, 2022.

Sincerely,

National WIC Association
1,000 Days
Advocates for Better Children's Diets
A Better Balance
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Alliance to End Hunger
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Heart Association
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Bread for the World
Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation of Harvard Law School
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)
Children's Defense Fund
Children's HealthWatch
Coalition for Healthy School Food
Coalition on Human Needs

Danone NA
Fair Food Network
Farmers Market Coalition
Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE)
FoodCorps
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Hunger Free America
ICNA Council for Social Justice (ICNA CSJ)
International Fresh Produce Association
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Leah's Pantry
March of Dimes
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Migrant Legal Action Program
Mom2Mom Global
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Counties
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education (NASDME)
National Association for Health and Fitness
National League for Nursing
National Grocers Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Nemours Children's Health
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nurse-Family Partnership
Partnership for America's Children
Pinnacle Prevention
The Praxis Project
Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness
RESULTS
Save the Children
Share Our Strength
Society of Behavioral Medicine
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Souper Bowl of Caring, Inc.
Sustainable Food Policy Alliance, including member companies
 Danone NA, Mars Incorporate, Nestlé USA, and Unilever United
States Trust for America's Health
Tusk Philanthropies
Union of Concerned Scientists
Vouchers 4 Veggies – Eat SF
ZERO TO THREE

cc: The Honorable Charles Schumer
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
The Honorable Sanford Bishop

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
The Honorable John Hoeven
The Honorable Andy Harris