Sample Sign-On Letter for Child Nutrition Reauthorization

[DATE]

[YOUR STATE’S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION/ADDRESSEE]

[POSITION]

[ADDRESSEE ORGANIZATION]

[ADDRESSEE ORGANIZATION’S STREET ADDRESS]

[ADDRESSEE ORGANIZATION TOWN, STATE, & ZIP]

Dear [ADDRESSEE]:

*The undersigned organizations offer the following recommendations to address hunger while improving nutrition and health, and to increase access to affordable, nutritious food, particularly for communities of color and low-income families. While our organizations have specific missions and priorities, we are guided by the following shared principles that shape our collective priorities. Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) must: I) ensure access to healthy meals for all students, II) protect and strengthen evidence-based nutrition standards for school meals and other foods sold in schools, and [ANY OTHER PRIORITIES TO HIGHLIGHT.]*

**Recommendation: The USDA and Congress must expand and protect access to healthy school meals for all children.**

School breakfast and lunch have never been more important. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened food and nutrition insecurity for children in the United States, and for many children school meals are the only nutritious meals they receive that day. In response to the pandemic, Congress temporarily authorized free school meals for all children. If Congress does not act to include healthy school meals for all in CNR, schools will no longer be able to provide healthy school meals to many students. As a result, countless children will lose their free meals by next school year. School meals are a critical source of nutrition for kids, and research shows that healthy school meals for all leads to better attendance and academic performance.

In [YOUR STATE], the school breakfast and lunch programs feed [TOTAL] children every day – most from families in need. Congress must make healthy school meals for all permanent, for example by including the Universal School Meals Program Act (S. 1530/H.R. 3115) in CNR. Currently through the COVID waiver process, programs can provide school meals for all children regardless of their family’s income through June 2022. Many children from struggling families do not otherwise qualify for free school meals, and school meal fees create a barrier to participation. Healthy school meals for all would put an end to “lunch shaming” policies like receiving a cold meal or a stamp on the child’s hand for past-due meal balances. It would also enable children whose families’ income fluctuates across the eligibility line to consistently access healthy, nutritious food during school. Healthy school meals for all also eliminates the administrative burden on families and schools. Schools are still reeling from deficit spending to feed children, and healthy school meals for all would guarantee these programs remain solvent.

Providing healthy school meals for all is universally supported by school food service directors, school-based groups, public health, and the nutrition and anti-hunger community and is overwhelmingly supported by school officials and parents. The economic downfall will likely mean an influx of children newly eligible for free school meals once the COVID waivers are no longer available. Congress must make healthy school meals for all permanent in CNR.

**Recommendation: The USDA and Congress must protect and strengthen evidence-based nutrition standards for school meals and other foods sold in schools.**

Schools have made tremendous progress providing kids more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; less salt and fat; and healthier beverages and snacks. Progress that experts estimate could save nearly $800 million in healthcare-related costs over 10 years. Science-based nutrition standards have been shown to decrease disparities in access to healthy food, improve nutrition, and can lower health costs. However, that progress has stalled due to repeated setbacks from Congress and most recently from rollbacks by the previous administration that have now been invalidated by a federal district court.

Schools are currently required to meet the updated school meal nutrition standards rule from 2012 (77 FR 4088, January 26, 2012). The school meal nutrition standards are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and the current standards from 2012 are no longer in alignment with the most recent recommendations.

While the vast majority of schools meet these 2012 standards, many schools are still working on meeting Tier 2 and 3 sodium-reduction targets and working toward providing more whole grains. Most important, in the 2012 rule there is no limit on added sugars in school meals – inconsistent with the 2015 and 2020 Dietary Guidelines recommendation that no more than ten percent of calories come from added sugars. Schools will need to get back on track toward safe and healthy levels of sodium and sugar, and providing 100-percent whole-grain-rich items.

* The USDA must initiate a rulemaking to:
  + Update the timeline for meeting the sodium-reduction targets and craft a fourth reduction target to align with the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), taking into account that more time may be needed post-pandemic to achieve these goals;
  + Restore the 100 percent whole-grain-rich requirement;
  + Restore the limit on flavored 1 percent (low-fat) milk or implement a calorie limit consistent with expert recommendations. An added sugars standard for school meals would also help address excessively sugary flavored milks; and
  + Consistent with the DGA, establish an added sugars standard for school meals and replace the total sugar standard with an added sugars standard for competitive foods.
* Congress must oppose efforts that weaken evidence-based school nutrition standards. Legislating requirements for specific nutrients or carving out specific food items sets a precedent that serves to undermine the integrity of school meals. Absence USDA rulemaking, Congress can require such rulemaking.

Aligning the nutrition standards with the latest DGA would help schools provide children with meals with more whole grains and less sodium and added sugars, consistent with the law. They would promote children’s’ long-term health, and their ability to learn. We must ensure that the meals provided to children at school contribute to, rather than harm, their health.

Sincerely,

[SIGNING ORGANIZATIONS, IN ALPHABETIC ORDER]

*Endorsement of these principles does not imply that signatories have taken a position on any bills referenced.*

**About [YOUR ORGANIZATION/COALITION]**

[BRIEF, 1 PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATIONAL BLURB] [WEBSITE]

For more information, please contact [CONTACT EMAIL ADDRESS/PERSON IF APPLICABLE]

[DATE SENT]