

~~HUNGER~~ FREE AMERICA

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April 3rd, 2019

The Honorable Robert Scott
Chairman of the House Committee on Education & Labor
1201 Longworth House Office Building,
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Bobby Scott,

On behalf of America's hungry children, I am writing to request you to use your leadership role on the House Education and Labor Committee to draft and enact a Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill this year that dramatically reduces domestic child hunger, which is now at crisis levels.

In 2017, even when the stock market was soaring, fully 12.5 million U.S. children – equaling 17 percent (one out of six) children in the nation – lived in food insecure households, according to USDA. Please see the enclosed Hunger Atlas, created by Hunger Free America, to see the vast levels of child food insecurity in your home state.

Not only does child hunger devastate the mental and physical health of the most vulnerable members of our society, it places a massive roadblock in the way of their educational advancement. After all, to be schooled you must be fueled; to be well read, you must be well-fed.

The United States is the only Western industrialized nation with this massive level of child hunger, even when compared on a per capita basis to other countries.

The time is long overdue to end child hunger and food insecurity in the United States. We have long had the resources and know-how to ensure every American child grows up without suffering from food insecurity, but have lacked the political will to do it. The two most important tools to end child hunger are a robust Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and strong federal child nutrition programs. While we are disappointed that the previous Congress did not add resources to SNAP in the most recent Farm Bill, we are grateful that a bi-partisan coalition in Congress defeated SNAP cuts.

For many struggling families unable to access SNAP, or for whom SNAP benefits are inadequate, the federal child nutrition safety net is their only hope of feeding their children nutritiously, or at all. That is why it is imperative that the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill expands and strengthens such programs – and ensures adequate funding for them – to ensure that USDA, state and local governments, school districts, nonprofit service providers, and rank-and-file nutrition program workers are able to work together to slash child hunger with the full force of the federal government – and thus the American people – behind them.

ENDING HUNGER LIFTS US ALL

As both program managers and advocates with decades of expertise in child nutrition work, we implore you to, in 2019, write and enact into law a Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill which accomplishes the following major improvements:

- 1) **Makes school lunches and breakfasts universal and free, with no paperwork required, for all K-12 students** across the country, and eliminates the “Free” and “Reduced” Price categories from these programs. When then-Senator Thad Cochran, a Republican from Mississippi, was chair of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, he indicated that such a move would save money over time by dramatically reducing bureaucracy, and we strongly agree.
- 2) **Mandates that all high-needs schools serve Breakfast after the Bell**, either in the form of in-classroom breakfasts or grab-and-go breakfasts. This mandate should include any school that participates in the National School Lunch Program and in which 30 percent or more of the students are from families with incomes at 185 percent or below of the poverty line. Given that only half the children who receive school lunches on a daily basis now receive school breakfasts, this step is urgently needed to increase breakfast participation.
- 3) **Expands summer meals programs to weekends and vacations.** Most schools are open only 180 days out of a year – children desperately need to eat the other 185 days of the year.
- 4) **Eliminates the congregate feeding requirement for summer meals.** Especially given that many summer meals sites have no air conditioning, children should be able to take food home or elsewhere to eat, and service providers should be reimbursed for the meals when they do.
- 5) **Reduces the poverty threshold for open summer meals sites to areas in which 30 percent or more of the students are from families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the poverty line.** The current threshold is 50 percent, thus excluding many food insecure children, particularly in rural and suburban areas.
- 6) **Implements a major, nationwide expansion of the Summer EBT Program.** The pilot Summer EBT program proved conclusively that such efforts reduce child hunger. More than 80 percent of children who eat school meals fail to obtain federally-funded summer meals. While the steps suggested above to increase access to the existing Summer Food Service Program would help somewhat, alternative summer delivery mechanisms – such as the Summer EBT Program – would still very much be needed.
- 7) **Increases and regionally-indexes the federal reimbursement rates** for NSLP, NSBP, SFSP, and CACFP. Food and labor costs vary dramatically by locale, and in high-cost locales, schools and students should not suffer as a result.
- 8) **Makes the WIC program an entitlement** and reduces paperwork for both participants and retailers. This vital program should not need to struggle for appropriations each year

and should serve all people eligible. Also, women in the program should be able to access more of their services by video or audio communications rather than being forced to physically travel, along with their children, to clinics for every interaction.

- 9) **Ensures WIC EBT cards are integrated with SNAP EBT cards.** Low-income Americans should not be forced to juggle two cards to get food nor should retailers be forced to accept two cards to provide it.
- 10) **Integrates child nutrition program applications with other federal feeding program applications to reduce the burden of applying for food on low-income individuals.** Hunger Free America's proposal for doing so can be accessed here:
<https://www.progressivepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/REPORT-Fighting-Poverty-with-HOPE.pdf>
- 11) **Maintains the stronger school meals nutritional standards enacted into law by the previous passed child nutrition reauthorization bill.** The Trump Administration efforts to unilaterally rollback these standards puts our children at higher risk for obesity, diabetes, and other adverse health outcomes.

With our nation's children at stake, we hope that you prioritize their health and educational attainment by enacting – and fully funding – a very strong child nutrition bill. **The stakes are so high that it will not be nearly sufficient for the bill to just marginally tinker with or slightly reform these programs; our children very much need the bold, big steps proposed above.**

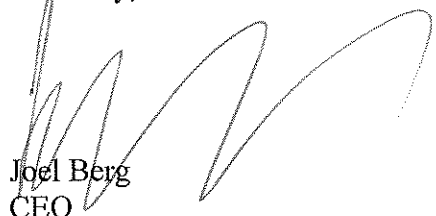
We believe that such efforts should be funded by ensuring that wealthy Americans pay their fair share of taxes and/or by reducing wasteful corporate welfare. **Not a penny of the funding from this bill should be taken from other anti-hunger or anti-poverty programs.**

If you hold additional hearings on the child nutrition bill or on related topics, we would welcome an invitation to testify to fully explain our proposals and to answer any questions from committee members.

In the meantime, if you and/or your staff would like to discuss these or related issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at jberg@hungerfreeamerica.org or 212-825-0028, ext. 204.

We thank you in advance for taking strong, meaningful leadership to end child hunger in America.

Sincerely,



Joel Berg
CEO
Hunger Free America

