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July 26, 2022

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.4 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), including child care providers, parents of school children and school employees, I urge you to support the amendment in the nature of a substitute to The Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act (H.R. 8450).

The Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act takes the important step of providing proactive solutions to improve children's health and nutrition at a critical time when inflation is putting access to healthy foods out of reach for many families. This bill would modernize and improve critical nutrition programs ranging from those that support pregnant women and infants to babies and young children in child care and Head Start to school-aged children.

Because Congress could not reach an agreement on child nutrition programs five years ago, these programs have not been updated in 10 years. Since then, our country has experienced an explosion in food insecurity and inequities impacting low-income children and children of color. It is essential that this bill move forward to ensure that these essential nutritional services reach the people who need them. Investing these resources at the front end will provide savings at the back end, as we know that proper nutrition is critically important to growth and development, particularly brain development, for babies and young children.

The Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act makes several important improvements including: Expanding access to school meals by expanding Community Eligibility, which will also make the program more efficient and reduce needless and time-consuming paperwork; Providing needed increases in school meals, increasing lunch by 10 cents; Investing \$35 million in school kitchens to incentivize scratch cooking; Expanding the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) by expanding eligibility through age six, improving access to telehealth, and expanding breastfeeding support; and Authorizing Summer ECT at \$75 per month for eligible households and expanding the reach of the Summer Food Service Program to include more low- and middle-income neighborhoods.

The significant investments in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) will streamline the program to promote efficiency by making children in families receiving SNAP automatically eligible, adding an additional meal service and ensuring that reimbursement rates are fair for providers. Currently, CACFP only reimburses for two meals and a snack even though many children are in child care for every meal service. These changes would enable either supper or an additional snack to be reimbursed. It also ensures that reimbursement rates for meals served by family child care providers are subject to the same COLA that other child care meals receive. In addition, it requires a review of instances of “serious deficiency,” which has caused some providers to lose their state licenses and become unable to work due to minor infractions. At a time when child care providers have been under considerable strains, including economic and financial hardship exacerbated by the pandemic, these are welcome, long overdue changes.

AFSCME also supports agency review mandated for food service management companies. I urge you to vote yes on the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act. Please contact Becky Levin at 202-321-3782 or blevin@afscme.org with any questions.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Jayne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Ed Jayne
Director, Federal Government Affairs

ESJ:BL:cg