

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

April 12, 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

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

For nearly fifty years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has enhanced access to nutritious foods for its target population, helping to grow a healthier next generation. The undersigned organizations – a diverse coalition of maternal and public health organizations, children’s advocates, agriculture partners, and retail and industry stakeholders – urge Congress to reiterate its longstanding bipartisan commitment to WIC’s role in improving health outcomes by investing \$6.3 billion in budget authority for fiscal year 2023, maintaining set-asides at current levels, and extending the WIC benefit bump for fruits and vegetables through fiscal year 2023.

Investing in proven, early interventions that strengthen nutrition security is demonstrated to grow a healthier population and reduce healthcare expenditures in the long-term. In 2018, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimated that Medicaid and Medicare spent more than \$207 billion to treat chronic diet-related conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease¹ – approximately 15.3% of *all* Medicaid and Medicare spending.² WIC’s role in assuring healthier birth outcomes more than doubles its return on investment – for every dollar spent on WIC, about \$2.48 is returned in healthcare cost savings.³ WIC’s cost savings are even more pronounced, as WIC’s role in reducing the prevalence of childhood obesity among enrolled toddlers mitigates or prevents the onset of chronic diet-related conditions, setting up a healthier next generation for future life success.⁴ Congress must thoughtfully invest in the nation’s food systems and nutrition assistance programs to leverage WIC’s effective intervention to reduce overall healthcare expenditures and aid the nation’s healthcare programs and systems in finding firmer fiscal footing in the long-term.

In fiscal year 2022, Congress invested in one of the nation’s most successful nutrition security initiatives – increasing WIC’s fruit and vegetable benefit to enhance access to nutritious foods for more than 4.75 million women and children.⁵ The WIC benefit, which has remained relatively static since the program was established in 1974, has delivered improved health outcomes with relatively modest investment – before the pandemic, the average WIC benefit of \$36/month constituted less than 9 percent of an average grocery budget.⁶ With the WIC benefit bump included in fiscal year 2022 appropriations, enhanced fruit and vegetable values now reflect 50 percent of recommended intake according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.⁷ Children receive \$24/month for fruits and vegetables, instead of a mere \$9/month, and women receive \$43-47/month. Only a few months

after the enhanced benefits were rolled out by WIC providers nationwide, the National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute measured an increase of ¼ cup per day in fruit and vegetable consumption by WIC-enrolled young children.⁸

The science-based WIC benefit bump not only shifts WIC participants' diets into greater alignment with federal nutrition recommendations, but also strengthens communities and contributes to local economies. WIC families are redeeming more than triple the amount of fruits and vegetables, bolstering transactions at local retailers and independent grocers.⁹ With added value, WIC families are able to introduce a greater variety of produce to their young children – substantially boosting sales for certain products, such as pears, cherries and berries, stone fruits, tropical fruits, seasonal fruits, and root vegetables.¹⁰ In at least 22 State Agencies, enhanced fruit and vegetable benefit can be redeemed at farmers' markets – directly returning investment to local growers and producers.¹¹ The WIC benefit bump also contributes to WIC's role in insulating participants from fluctuations in food costs, as fruits and vegetables are the only food categories that are issued as a cash-value, instead of reimbursed by quantity.¹²

As Congress strategically considers WIC's role in leveraging food systems to grow a healthier next generation, we urge the Committee to increase the allocation to the Agriculture/FDA Appropriations bill to \$28.5 billion in discretionary funding, consistent with President's Budget. Increased allocation can assure enhanced WIC investments and account for rising food costs without impacting other vital agriculture programs, with the President's Budget proposing a \$3.375 billion increase over the Agriculture/FDA Appropriations enacted level in fiscal year 2022. USDA has signaled that it intends to update the WIC food packages in fiscal year 2023. The National Academies of Sciences recognized that additional investment is needed to provide more nutritious foods – including fruits and vegetables, as well as seafood and other food categories – to WIC participants in an effort to align participants' diets with 50 percent of recommended intake under the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.¹³ Congress should eliminate or minimize the rescissions to WIC funding to provide adequate funding for science-based food packages, consistent with the National Academies recommendations and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

In addition, longstanding set-asides for breastfeeding peer counselors (\$90 million) and infrastructure (\$14 million) contribute to WIC's ongoing service model. Since 1998, WIC has driven a 30 percent increase in breastfeeding initiation rates among participating infants. Maintaining these set-asides at current levels, as enacted in fiscal year 2022, will assure continuity in WIC service delivery.

WIC's proven intervention is well positioned to have a broader public health impact in the years ahead, with pandemic-related waivers allowing for remote appointment options and essential investments from the American Rescue Plan Act modernizing access to the program. In the first 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, WIC saw a 10 percent increase in child participation – upending recent trends as a new generation of families connected with WIC's public health nutrition services.¹⁴ As Congress begins the process of evaluating fiscal year 2023, we urge Congress to renew its ongoing bipartisan commitment to WIC's role in strengthening nutrition security to build the foundation for healthier futures for moms and young children.

Sincerely,

National WIC Association

1,000 Days
2020 Mom
A Better Balance
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Advocates for Better Children's Diets
Alliance to End Hunger
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Heart Association
American Society for Nutrition
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of SNAP Nutrition Education Administrators (ASNNA)
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
Bread For the World
Bright Future Lactation Resource Centre Ltd.
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Health Fund
Children's HealthWatch
Coalition for Healthy School Food
Coalition on Human Needs
Commissioned Officers Association of the US Public Health Service
Common Threads
Council for a Strong America
Danone North America
Fair Food Network
FARE (Food Allergy Research and Education)
Farmers Market Coalition
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
FoodFinder
Global Employee Health & Fitness Month
Hunger Free America
International Fresh Produce Association
Islamic Relief USA
LunchAssist
March of Dimes
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Mom Congress
MomsRising
National Association for Health and Fitness
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of Counties (NACo)

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Community Action Partnership
National Farm to School Network
National Grocers Association
National League for Nursing
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nurse-Family Partnership
Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness
RESULTS
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)
Share Our Strength
SimpliFed
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Trust for America's Health
U.S. Breastfeeding Committee
Union of Concerned Scientists
Vouchers 4 Veggies - EatSF
ZERO TO THREE

cc: The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
The Honorable John Hoeven
The Honorable Sanford Bishop
The Honorable Andy Harris

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. *Chronic Health Conditions: Federal Strategy Needed to Coordinate Diet-Related Efforts*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-593>.

² U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. *CMS Office of the Actuary Releases 2018 National Health Expenditures*. <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cms-office-actuary-releases-2018-national-health-expenditures>.

³ Nianogo R, Wang M, Basturo-Davila R, Nobari T, Prelip M, Arah O, Whaley S (2019) Economic evaluation of California prenatal participation in the special supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to prevent preterm birth. *Journal of Preventative Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpmed.2019.04.011>.

⁴ Obesity Among Young Children Enrolled in WIC. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/obesity-among-WIC-enrolled-youngchildren.html> (last updated May 24, 2021).

⁵ National WIC Association (2022) State-by-State Impacts of the WIC Benefit Bump: April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/wic-benefit-bump-state-by-state.pdf>.

⁶ National WIC Association (2022) The State of WIC: Investing in the Next Generation. https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/state-of-wic_2022.pdf.

⁷ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) *Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, at 271. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

⁸ Ritchie L, Lee D, Felix C, Sallack L, Chauvenet C, Machel G, Whaley SE (2022) Multi-State WIC Participant Survey: Cash Value Benefit Increase During COVID. The National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

⁹ National WIC Association (2022) The State of WIC: Investing in the Next Generation.
https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/state-of-wic_2022.pdf.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services. *Farmers Market Nutrition Program*.
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/fmnp/wic-farmers-market-nutrition-program>

¹² See 7 C.F.R. §246.10(e).

¹³ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017. *Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report* (262-3). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
<https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services. *WIC Data Tables*.
<https://fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program>