



## **Written Testimony to the National Commission on Hunger**

**Submitted by  
Marian Wright Edelman  
President, Children's Defense Fund  
July 30, 2015**

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Dr. Chilton and Mr. Doar, Co-Chairs, and other Members of the National Commission on Hunger:

Thank you for inviting me to submit written testimony to the National Commission on Hunger on ways to reduce child hunger and food insecurity.

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) has been working for over forty years to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor children, children of color, and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before children get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

My lifelong commitment to ending child poverty and the child hunger it creates was strengthened during my early days in Mississippi as an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Arriving in 1964, shortly after President Johnson declared a War on Poverty in his State of the Union Address, I stayed in Mississippi for the next three years and many of the lessons I learned then guide me to this day. Life conditions were dire for many families. Tens of thousands of people didn't have jobs and many lacked any income at all. None. So they couldn't even afford the two dollars the state started requiring for food stamps as the state program changed over from free food commodities. The poverty I witnessed was shocking, widespread, and unconscionable in a rich country like the United States, or in any decent country. Families had nothing to eat, their cupboards were entirely bare. People were hungry and some were starving. Children were chronically undernourished and some literally starved.

In 1967, I was asked to testify before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty in Washington about how the anti-poverty program in Mississippi was working. I urged the Senators to visit the Mississippi Delta with me to experience for themselves the hungry poor in our very rich nation, to visit the shacks and look into the deadened eyes of hungry children with bloated bellies—a level of hunger many people did not believe could exist in America. “They are starving and someone has to help them,” I said.

In April 1967, Senators Robert Kennedy, Joseph Clark and George Murphy visited homes in Cleveland, Mississippi, asking respectfully of each dweller what they had had for breakfast, lunch, or dinner the night before. Robert Kennedy opened their empty ice boxes and cupboards after asking permission. I watched him hover, visibly moved, on a dirt floor in a dirty dark shack out of television-camera range over a listless baby with bloated belly from whom he tried in vain to get a response. He lightly touched the cheeks, shoulders, and hands of the children clad in ragged clothes outside who responded to his question “What did you have for breakfast?” saying “We haven't had breakfast yet,” although it was nearly noon. And he tried to offer words of encouragement to their hopeless mothers.

Thanks to the efforts of tireless advocates, we roused the conscience of the nation to this tragedy of poverty and hunger and helped set in motion major expansions of the federal food and other safety net programs that over time eradicated the severe malnutrition I witnessed in Mississippi and had lifelong

impacts on those who benefited. I can tell you with confidence and gratitude that we have made great progress against poverty and hunger since then. At the same time, despite important progress, the United States is still not a fair playing field for millions of children afflicted by preventable poverty, hunger, homelessness, sickness, poor education and violence in the world's richest economy with a gross domestic product of \$17 trillion.

The National Commission's charge to "effectively use existing programs and funds to address domestic hunger and food insecurity" could not be more timely or more important. The United States has the second highest child poverty rate among 35 industrialized countries despite having the largest economy in the world. A child in the United States has a 1 in 5 chance of being poor and the younger she is the poorer she is likely to be. A child of color, who will be in the majority of U.S. children in 2020, is more than twice as likely to be poor as a White child. This is unacceptable and unnecessary. Growing up poor has lifelong negative consequences, decreasing the likelihood of graduating from high school and increasing the likelihood of becoming a poor adult, suffering from poor health, and becoming involved in the criminal justice system. These impacts cost the nation at least half a trillion dollars a year in lost productivity and increased health and crime costs. Letting a fifth of our children grow up poor prevents them from having equal opportunities to succeed in life and robs the nation of their future contributions.

Substantial progress in reducing child poverty has been made over the past 50 years, despite worsening income inequality, increased unemployment, and lower wages. Child poverty dropped over a third from 1967 to 2012 when income from in-kind benefits like nutrition and housing assistance and tax credits are counted. Without these federal safety net programs child poverty would have been 68 percent higher in 2013, and 8.2 million additional children would have been poor. Despite this progress, 12.2 million children were poor in 2013 even after taking into account federal safety net programs because good jobs are still too scarce and safety net programs are stretched far too thin. However, as the Children's Defense Fund recently outlined earlier this year in our *Ending Child Poverty Now!* report, the U.S. can significantly reduce child poverty now by making relatively modest new investments in nine programs and policies, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, that we know work. Together these investments targeted on making work pay more and addressing children's basic needs can reduce child poverty by 60 percent and child poverty of Black children by 72 percent.

## **CHILD HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY THREATEN CHILDREN'S FUTURES**

*Kaylyn Sigman is a high school senior with big plans. A star soccer player from a poor rural Appalachian Ohio community who loves calculus and creative writing, she's college bound this fall and dreams of becoming a middle school special education teacher. Kaylyn's overcome a lot to arrive where she is today. Her parents' relationship was rocky throughout her childhood and they finally divorced when she was 10, leaving Kaylyn's mother alone to raise her, her younger sister, and two younger brothers who were adopted. Her mother, who suffers from seizures, worked as a labor and delivery nurse but is now on disability. Both brothers have special mental health needs and Kaylyn, a bright student who skipped second grade and was reading at the ninth grade level in third grade, has ADHD, all leading to an ongoing pile of medical appointments and bills. After her father left, Kaylyn's family struggled in poverty, moving seven times in four years trying to find an affordable place to stay. Kaylyn's mother says when they lost their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) benefits last year, their family never would have survived the toughest times without PB and J Day, held once a week during the summer months at the children's school through the local County Children's Services Agency. They'd come home with enough bread, peanut butter and jelly so each family member could have one sandwich for three meals a day until the next pickup.*

Families in the richest nation on earth should not have to depend on PB and J Day to survive like Kaylyn's does. Hunger and low food security go hand in hand with poverty and have dire consequences for children's health and ability to learn. Food insecurity affects an estimated 17.5 million American households<sup>ii</sup> and is particularly devastating for children whose developmental well-being and educational success depend on access to adequate nutrition. In 2013, more than 1 in 9 children (11.7 percent) lived in households where children were food insecure<sup>iii</sup>, and more than 1 in 5 children (21.4 percent) lived in households where *either* adults *or* children *or both* were food insecure.<sup>iv</sup> More than 45 percent of poor children lived in homes where not everyone had enough food.

Children of color are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. Black and Hispanic households are two times more likely to experience food insecurity, compared to their White, non-Hispanic counterparts.<sup>v</sup> In 2013, 7 percent of White, non-Hispanic households experienced food insecurity for children, compared to 17.3 percent of Black and 14.6 percent of Hispanic households.

Children living in food insecure households struggle to remain healthy<sup>vi</sup> and are more likely to fall ill than their food secure counterparts. As a result, they lag behind cognitively, socially, and physically. Food insecurity nearly doubles the health risks among children from birth to 3 years.<sup>vii</sup> Studies show poor, hungry children are more likely to suffer from health issues, including stomach aches, frequent colds, ear infections, asthma, anemia, and headaches.<sup>viii</sup> Food insecurity is also associated with more behavioral problems in 3 year olds, psychosocial deficits including anxiety and depression in school-aged children, and depressive disorders in adolescents.

Food insecurity also adversely affects a child's educational attainment.<sup>ix</sup> Data show that children who are marginally food insecure tend to lag behind their peers in school. By third grade, children who were food insecure in kindergarten demonstrate lower reading and math abilities than their food secure peers. Food insecure teens are more likely to have repeated a grade and missed more school days and<sup>x</sup> when compared to their food secure peers, were more than twice as likely to have been suspended and almost twice as likely to have difficulty getting along with others,<sup>xi</sup> propelling them into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® crisis.

The safety net has made it harder to find starving children with bloated bellies like those Senator Robert Kennedy met when visiting Mississippi in 1967. Thank God. But the quiet pangs of hunger and the documented signs of chronic malnutrition are still here, from rural Mississippi to inner cities to middle class suburbs where families have fallen on hard times. Today, there are still empty refrigerators and cupboards in too many homes across the country, but hungry bloated bellies have been replaced with obesity in far too many of our food insecure children.

Low-income, food-insecure populations are especially vulnerable to suffering from obesity.<sup>xii</sup> They have only limited access to health and affordable foods and opportunities for physical activity. Childhood obesity can be extremely detrimental to children, causing diabetes, high blood pressure, depression, poor academic performance, behavior problems, school absenteeism, and a greater risk of obesity as an adult. Low birthweight babies whose families were food insecure in early childhood are almost 28 times more likely than their peers to be overweight or obese at age 4 and a half. Today, one quarter of preschool children and one third of school aged children are overweight or obese. People living in low-income communities have problems finding access to affordable, healthy foods, and therefore often turn to cheap, sodium and calorie-dense foods that are filling, lower in nutritional value, higher in calories, and linked to obesity. Most children living in food insecure environments cycle through stressful periods of food deprivation and overeating. These chronic phases, as well as high stress levels, can contribute to weight gain.

## **BUILDING ON EFFECTIVE NUTRITION PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN**

Today, important nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program (SNAP/formerly known as food stamps), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the federal child nutrition programs work together to combat child and family hunger and food insecurity. They put food on children's plates, help build healthy minds and bodies, and help lift families out of poverty. But large gaps in participation remain in many of them, leaving millions of children at risk of hunger.

### **The Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program (SNAP)**

SNAP helped feed 20.5 million children in fiscal year FY 2012—more than 1 in 4 children in our nation. The extra resources it provides lifted 2.1 million children out of poverty in 2013. It's the second most effective program for rescuing families from poverty and the most effective program for rescuing families from deep poverty.<sup>xiii</sup>

SNAP also has long term positive impacts. A recent study of what began as the food stamp program looked back to the earliest days when it was rolled out county by county to identify children who had access to food stamps in early childhood and whose mothers had access during their pregnancies.<sup>xiv</sup> They tracked their progress from the 1960s and 1970s into adulthood, comparing them to similar children who didn't have access to food stamps. The results showed the power of nutrition: the children who had access to food stamps were less likely to have stunted growth, be obese, or have heart disease as adults—and the positive effects weren't just health-related. One of the largest differences was that children in families with food stamps were 18 percent more likely to graduate from high school.

SNAP's positive effects extend beyond individual children and families to entire communities. During a recession, the impact of SNAP's economic growth is estimated to be from \$1.73 to \$1.79 for every dollar of benefits provided. In the recent recession, SNAP proved to be indispensable lifeline for the millions of jobless families with no cash income in our rich nation— including the 4.9 million households with no income but SNAP, 1.3 million of which have children.<sup>xv</sup> But SNAP benefits still fall far short of the need. SNAP benefits now average less than \$1.40 a person a meal, and do not prevent hunger and food insecurity for many low-income families.<sup>xvi</sup> In 2013, more than half of families receiving SNAP were still food insecure and in need of further assistance.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**

Since 1974, WIC has provided crucial nutritional, educational, and health care support for low-income pregnant and post-partum women, infants, and children up to age 5.<sup>xviii</sup> The program has incredible reach, with more than 50 percent of infants born in the United States receiving WIC services, and 52 percent of pregnant women enrolling in WIC during their first trimester. In FY 2012, over 8.3 million low-income women and young children depended on the program every month.<sup>xix</sup> WIC is one of the nation's best public health nutrition programs, and evidence has proven it to be a cost-effective, sound investment for mothers and children.

A series of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) studies found that every dollar spent on prenatal care in the program prolongs pregnancies and reduces premature births, low birthweight infants, and infant deaths.<sup>xx</sup> Mothers receive prenatal care and postpartum benefits, which improve their overall physical and well-being. Children in the program are more likely to have a regular doctor, receive immunizations, and eat a more balanced diet. All of the components contribute to improved growth and

development, while ensuring that children enter school ready to learn and thrive in the classroom.<sup>xxi</sup> The program not only improves health outcomes, it has shown to reduce health care costs.<sup>xxii</sup> Studies have found savings in health care from \$1.77 to \$3.13 for WIC participants within the first 60 days after birth.

Using methodology from the National Research Council, the USDA estimates that there is significant unmet need for WIC services. In 2012, many WIC eligibles were unable to receive services entirely, with state-wide coverage rates ranging from a low of 44 percent in New Hampshire to a high of 82 percent in California.<sup>xxiii, xxiv</sup> While coverage of infants averaged 85 percent (ranging from 76 percent in the Mountain Plains region to 89 percent in the West), coverage for children age 1 to 4 was significantly lower, averaging just 53 percent (ranging from 44 percent in the Mountain Plains to 68 percent in the West).<sup>xxv</sup>

## **The National School Lunch and Breakfast and Summer Feeding Programs**

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the National School Breakfast Program (NSBP), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option all provide meals to low-income and food insecure children and play a vital role in ensuring children are fed and able to succeed in the classroom and during the summer months when school is out.<sup>xxvi</sup>

*The National School Lunch Program.* Created by Congress in 1946 in response to an investigation into the health of young men rejected by the World War II draft showing a strong connection between poor physical health and childhood malnutrition, today the National School Lunch program serves nearly 21.7 million children ensuring a nutritious free and reduced-price lunch.<sup>xxvii</sup> The NSLP is open to all children enrolled in a participating school; approximately 95 percent of public schools participate. Research suggests that the NSLP has an overall positive effect on the food security of families with children who participate in the program,<sup>xxviii</sup> results in superior nutritional intake compared to those who do not participate, and is linked to improvements in a child's behavior, school performance, and overall-all cognitive development.<sup>xxix</sup>

*The National School Breakfast Program.* In FY 2014, more than 11.5 million children received free and reduced-price breakfast through the National School Breakfast Program.<sup>xxx</sup> These children would likely not eat a nutritious breakfast each morning otherwise. Studies show that children who eat breakfast at school have better attendance, are less likely to be tardy and experience improved overall psychosocial well-being, discipline, and social behavior, while less likely to show aggression or engage in behaviors that lead to suspension. Children who eat a complete breakfast have also been found to make fewer mistakes on assignments, work faster in math and number checking tests, and perform better on standardized tests. They see significant improvements in concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory, attention, and learning. Compared to children who do not eat breakfast or eat breakfast at home, children who eat school breakfast are less likely to be overweight, have improved nutrition, eat more fruits, drink more milk, and consume a wider variety of foods.<sup>xxxi</sup>

*The Summer Food Service Program and the Seamless Summer Option.* While many children and families eagerly look forward to the end of the school year and the carefree days of summer, for more than 17 million children the end of school can be the end of certainty about where and when their next meal will come. While 21.7 million children received free or reduced price lunches during the 2013-2014 school year, only 3.8 million children—just 17.5 percent—received summer meals, either through the Summer Food Service Program or the National School Lunch Program's Seamless Summer Option. This huge participation gap suggests that about 4 in 5 of the children who benefit from free or reduced price lunches during the school year may not be receiving the nourishment necessary for proper physical,

cognitive, and social development during the long summer months.<sup>xxxii</sup> There has been progress. USDA data show that between July 2013 and July 2014, the number of children participating in the Summer Food Service Program increased by more than 220,000 and 11 million more meals were served to hungry children. Our friends at the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) note in their annual report on summer meals that during this same time period, the number of sponsors and sites across the country also increased. However, more must be done to close the participation gap and prevent millions of children from going continue to going hungry during the summer months.

### **The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**

The CACFP provides vital nutritional support to children and older or chronically disabled adults in various child and adult care settings. In FY 2013, the program provided meals to 3.5 million children and 116,000 elderly or disabled adults each day, with a total of more than 1.9 billion meals and snacks in that year.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Research has shown that healthy eating and good nutrition are particularly important for brain development during birth to 5 years. Children in programs with CACFP actually receive meals that are more loaded in essential nutrients and lower in fats and sweets than children in child care settings without CACFP.<sup>xxxiv</sup> This program has been especially critical for families who might otherwise not be able to provide similar quality and quantity of food for their children outside of the child care setting.

The CACFP improves the quality of care and provides balanced, nutritious meals and snacks that contribute to overall wellness and health for both children and adults. The program incorporates nutrition education to help children jumpstart good eating habits at a young age, helping at risk children to maintain a healthy weight and develop fully. Low-income families are also able to afford healthy, safe child care, which creates stability for working parents to keep working.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO HELP END CHILD HUNGER**

Children have only one childhood, and that childhood determines much of what they grow up to accomplish. This means we adults have only one short time window in which to make sure that all children, regardless of the lottery of birth, are nurtured and fed, physically and spiritually, and are educated and supported to grow up to be the best they can be. We must continue to build on the progress we have made in providing nutrition assistance to low-income children and families and home and in school settings throughout the year and seek to close the participation gap and enhance the availability of nutritious foods in communities across the country.

The Children's Defense Fund urges the National Commission on Hunger to reinforce in your report to Congress the importance of ending child poverty now if we really want to end child hunger. At the same time, we also urge you to include the following recommendations to improve access to high quality and nutritious meals for the millions of hungry children in America. Our recommendations recognize that federal nutrition programs for children reach hungry children at different ages, at different locations and at different times. Together they help provide a safety net for children as we move forward to end child poverty. We must continue to move forward, not backwards in preventing child hunger in our rich nation.

### **Enhance the Anti-Hunger and Anti-Poverty Impacts of SNAP on Children**

- **Maintain SNAP's current structure and funding level and resist proposed reductions in SNAP funding.** Nearly half of all SNAP recipients are children. Structural and funding changes would hurt millions of children and threaten the program's ability to respond when families need

help the most. Every major bipartisan deficit commission (e.g., Simpson-Bowles, Domenici-Rivlin, Gang of Six) has chosen not to make cuts in SNAP.

- **Base SNAP benefits on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Low-Cost Food Plan, which is approximately 30 percent higher in value than the Thrifty Food Plan on which SNAP benefits are currently based.** While SNAP reaches a large proportion of poor families, millions of children are hungry because benefits are not enough to ensure adequate nutrition. As outlined in CDF’s recent report, *Ending Child Poverty Now*, SNAP benefits average less than \$1.40 per person per meal — not enough for low-income families who often lack access to affordable nutritious food. In 2013, 54 percent of families receiving SNAP were still food insecure, clear evidence that current SNAP benefits are insufficient to meet families’ food needs.<sup>xxxv</sup> During the recession, Congress recognized that SNAP benefits were too low for many and increased the value of the maximum benefit by 13.6 percent.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The Urban Institute estimated that the temporary SNAP boost kept 831,000 children from poverty in 2010, meaning that child poverty would have been 7.6 percent higher than it was if SNAP benefits had not been increased. Unfortunately Congress terminated that increase in November 2013.

To increase the anti-poverty and anti-hunger impacts of SNAP for families with children, CDF asked the Urban Institute to model SNAP benefits on USDA’s Low-Cost Food Plan rather than the Thrifty Food Plan.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Basing SNAP benefits on the Low-Cost Food Plan would reduce child poverty by 16.2 percent, lifting 1.8 million children out of poverty. All of the existing 11.1 million SNAP families with children and an additional 1.5 million with children who would begin participating in SNAP because of the benefit increase would be helped. On average, households would receive an additional \$722 each year. Eighty three percent of the cost of this new investment would benefit children at or below 150 percent of the Supplemental Poverty Measure.

### **Improve Access to Summer Meals: Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation**

- **Build on the innovative strategies that have been tested and proven successful in helping to improve access to nutritious meals during the summer months.** Over the last few years, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service has been piloting strategies in diverse communities across the country to help overcome barriers children and families face in accessing summer meals. For example, recognizing that transportation can be a major barrier in rural areas, some programs successfully used mobile vans to provide meals, especially helpful in rural communities.

In other communities without summer feeding sites, USDA has allowed the use of electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards—like those used for SNAP and WIC—to transfer money to families so they can purchase extra food for their children in the summer. A 2012 evaluation of the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children demonstration found that a \$60 a month child benefit reduced the percent of children experiencing “very low food security,” the USDA’s most severe measure of food insecurity, by one-third and helped reduce food insecurity in the household. Sites in Arizona, Kansas, and Ohio in 2011 and 2012 participated in a demonstration program, providing weekend and holiday meals in backpacks for children in the Summer Food Service Program when the program was not serving meals. These sites saw substantial increases not only in the number of meals served but also in average daily attendance rates.

CDF supports two bipartisan bills currently pending in Congress *The Summer Meals Act of 2015* (S. 613 / H.R. 1728) and *The Stop Child Summer Hunger Act of 2015* (S. 1539/H.R. 2715), that seek to improve access to summer meals and decrease food insecurity when school is out for the



summer, by building on some of these demonstration programs. We recommend that the Commission consider the following proposals from these bills:

- **Provide low-income families with children an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card, for the summer to purchase food, in areas where access to existing Summer Nutrition Programs are limited.** This proposal would offer benefits of \$150 per summer to each eligible child and the amount will be adjusted annually based on inflation.
- **Improve the area eligibility test to allow community-based organizations to participate if 40 percent of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.** Currently, a summer meal site qualifies only if 50 percent or more of children in the area qualify for free or reduced-price school meals as defined by school or census data. This threshold keeps many communities with significant numbers of low-income children, but not a high enough concentration of poverty, from participating. In addition, the 50 percent test is inconsistent with federally-funded summer programs, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs and Title I programs which require at least 40 percent of the children qualify for free or reduced-priced meals.
- **Allow local government agencies and private nonprofit organizations to feed children year-round through a combination of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Summer Food Service Program. Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).** Although many children remain in child care and other programs during the school year and the summer, programs must now apply to and operate separately the two programs. This creates duplicative paperwork and confusing administrative rules that may discourage participation in the Summer Feeding Program.
- **Provide funding for transportation grants to fund innovative approaches and mobile meal trucks.** These grants will increase low-income children's access to summer meals in rural and other under-served areas. Many children at home during the summer have difficulty getting to summer sites.
- **Allow all summer sites to serve a third meal.** Many summer meal sites provide child care to working parents and run all day, but most are only able to serve a maximum of two meals. This may leave children without enough nutrition to get through the day or force sites to use program dollars for food.

### **Ensure Nutritious Meals for Hungry Children.**

- **Maintain WIC's current eligibility rules and nutritional supports.** The new WIC food package will be fully introduced in all states this fall, reflecting recent improvements in the WIC program. The nutritional value of these food packages and the types of food products included are and must remain science based. Funding for the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, which provides fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, also helps them understand and use farmers' markets when accessible. These nutritional supports are essential for the millions of low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk.
- **Protect existing school nutrition standards.** The new school nutrition standards included in the 2010 Health, Hunger-Free Kids Act are critical to maintaining the health of the more than 30

million children who rely on school meals. These standards, the first improvements in 15 years, align school meals with the latest nutrition science and the real world circumstances of America's schools. They are key to improving nutrition shortfalls and helping to address the nation's obesity epidemic. A new child nutrition reauthorization bill must also include new funding to ensure nutrition quality and also strengthen program access and support participation by underserved children and communities.

- **Promote the use of Community Eligibility.** The Community Eligibility approach allows schools that predominantly serve low-income children to offer free, nutritious school meals to all students through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. Community Eligibility increases participation in the school meal programs, reduces labor costs for schools and increases federal revenues. Community Eligibility completely eliminates paper applications by using information from other programs, including SNAP and the Temporary Assistance Program for Needy Families (TANF), instead of traditional paper applications and reimburses schools through a formula based on the number of "identified students" through the other programs. The Center on Budget and Policy's Priorities reports that half of eligible schools adopted Community Eligibility in its first year of nationwide implementation; incentives are now needed to encourage states and districts to ensure all children in high poverty districts can benefit from community eligibility.

#### **Strengthen Access to Nutrition Meals for Children in Child Care and After School Programs.**

- **Strengthen and expand the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).** CDF supports *The Access to Healthy Food for Young Children Act of 2015* (S. 1833) to strengthen and expand CACFP by improving the area eligibility test, increasing CACFP reimbursements, enhancing funding for CACFP sponsors, and providing two year implementation funds to state CACFP agencies. Currently, child care settings are only eligible if their area has 50 percent or more low-income children. Lowering the area eligibility threshold to 40 percent would make more child care settings eligible for reimbursement of healthy meals and snacks.

Additional recommendations would increase participation in CACFP by allowing child care settings to serve a third meal for children who are there for eight or more hours, increase reimbursement by 10 cents per child per meal and providing additional funding for State CACFP agencies, all to promote successful implementation of CACFP and provide the new healthier meal pattern for their children.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

I call on members of the National Commission on Hunger and all of America's political leaders in every party at every level to whom you will be reporting to mount a long overdue, unwavering, and persistent war to prevent and eliminate child poverty and finish the task begun 50 years ago. If America is to lead in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century world, we must reset our economic and moral compass and do right by our children – *all* of them. God did not create two classes of children, the American Dream did not envisage two classes of children, and neither should we. It is not acceptable to have hungry children in America.

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<sup>i</sup> Children's Defense Fund (2015). "Ending Child Poverty Now."

<http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/PovertyReport/EndingChildPovertyNow.html>

<sup>ii</sup> 2011 and 2012 State Data: Feeding America (2013). "Map the Meal Gap: Highlights of Findings for Overall and Child Food Insecurity," Table 10. <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap/~media/Files/a-map-2011/2011-mmg-exec-summary.ashx> (Based on data from the Current Population Survey.) 2013 National Data: United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (2014). "Household Food Security in the United States," Table 1 B. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1565415/err173.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Food insecure households are households with children that had difficulty meeting basic food needs for either adults or children or both.

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- <sup>iv</sup> Coleman-Jensen, A., Christian, G., & Singh, A. (2014). "Household Food Security in the United States in 2013," Economic Research Report Number 173, United States Department of Agriculture.
- <sup>v</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>vi</sup> Child Trends Data Bank (2014). "Food Insecurity: Indicators on Child and Youth." [http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/117\\_Food\\_Insecurity.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/117_Food_Insecurity.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> Murphy, C. et. al, (2008). "Reading, Writing, and Hungry: The Consequences of Food Insecurity on Child, and on Our Nation's Economic Success," Partnership for America's Economic Success, Issues #6. [http://frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/reading\\_writing\\_hungry\\_report.pdf](http://frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/reading_writing_hungry_report.pdf)
- <sup>viii</sup> Child Trends Data Bank (2014). "Food Insecurity: Indicators on Child and Youth." [http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/117\\_Food\\_Insecurity.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/117_Food_Insecurity.pdf)
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>x</sup> Alaimo, K. et al. (2001). "Food Insufficiency and American School-Aged Children's Cognitive, Academic, and Psychological Development," *Pediatrics*, 108(1), 44-53.
- <sup>xi</sup> "Hunger and Obesity? Making the Connections," Fact Sheet, Food Research and Action Council. [https://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/hunger\\_and\\_obesity\\_frac.pdf](https://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/hunger_and_obesity_frac.pdf)
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid.
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