

USDA Food and Nutrition Service Northeast Region  
Child Nutrition Reauthorization Listening Session  
June 10, 2008  
Tip O'Neill Federal Building Auditorium  
10 Causeway Street, Boston, MA

**Nutrition Consortium of NYS**  
**Child Nutrition Reauthorization Testimony**

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My name is Casey Dinkin, and I am here on behalf of the Nutrition Consortium of NYS. We are a state-wide organization whose mission is to alleviate hunger in NYS, by expanding availability of, access to, and use of governmental nutrition assistance programs, through outreach, education, and advocacy.

To do so, we work directly with schools, parents, teachers, children, community organizations, and other nutrition assistance program providers in NYS.

Last July, I visited a summer food site, and I met a middle-school-aged girl who told me about her daily eating schedule for the summer. Everyday for breakfast, she told me, she would go to a free meal site sponsored by a local church. A few hours later, she went to her neighborhood park for a free lunch. "Other than that," she said, "I'm pretty much surviving on gum."

New York's children desperately need these programs. And these programs can and must do more. They must reach more children, with more meals, and with more nutritious foods.

In 2007, more than a million low-income children in NYS participated in the National School Lunch Program, but fewer than 40% of these children participated in school breakfast, and fewer than 30% received a summer lunch.

We commend the NY State Education Department and USDA for their work to increase access to these underutilized programs. Participation in these programs has grown each year. We also recognize the work of the schools, local government entities, non-profit organizations, and faith-based groups who carry out these programs in their communities.

But more children still need to be reached, and we look at the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization as an opportunity to improve child nutrition programs, so that they are easier to administer and operate, so that more children are able to access them, and so the food served will be of a nutritional quality to best help them learn, grow, and be healthy.

In the coming months, the Nutrition Consortium of NYS will be preparing and submitting detailed recommendations. Today, I will be sharing our overall recommendations, as well as a few specifics, particularly related to the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Summer Food Service Program.

- 1) **Streamline paperwork requirements and increase efficiency.** We strongly recommend that paperwork requirements be streamlined. The amount of paperwork is a deterrent to participation in child nutrition programs, for both potential program providers, as well as for families. We are thrilled that Simplified Summer Food has been expanded to all states, including NYS, and expect to see the impact of this streamlining of paperwork on program expansion and participation increases. We recommend that further measures such as this included in the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization, including requiring electronic data matching for direct certification.
- 2) **Increase reimbursement rates.** Under current reimbursement rates, more and more providers are forced to operate child nutrition programs at a loss. This problem is exacerbated by the current rise in food and fuel costs. Additionally, low reimbursement rates deter potential providers from operating programs, and financial losses drive providers to discontinue operation.
- 3) **Improve food quality.** Making improvements to food quality is challenging under current reimbursement rates, but given our recommendation to increase reimbursements, we also recommend establishing improved dietary quality standards for meals served through child nutrition programs. For many of the children served by these programs, these meals provide the only good nutrition they receive on a given day. Food service directors in low-income districts tell us that they intentionally plan menus on Fridays and Mondays to contain more food than on other days, because they know that many of the children won't eat over the weekend. Because these meals are the cornerstone of these children's diets, it is imperative that the quality of the meals align with current dietary guidelines.
- 4) **Provide funding for outreach.** Outreach is vital to increasing participation in child nutrition programs, and we know that outreach works. Child nutrition programs, particularly the Summer Food Program and School Breakfast Program, are not reaching all of the low-income children who need them. Funding for outreach is an essential part of changing this.
- 5) **Expand eligibility and availability of programs.** We recommend that this Child Nutrition Reauthorization include measures to expand eligibility for child nutrition programs. Time and again we are seeing communities that desperately need the Summer Food Service Program, that are just below the 50% eligibility threshold needed to operate the program, and therefore cannot. We strongly recommend eliminating the charge for reduced price meals, in order to increase access for children, as well as simplify program administration. We also support funding for start up grants so that schools can begin universal classroom breakfast programs.

We thank you for offering this listening session, and for the time to give these remarks.