

Calling on Congress to Renew and Strengthen the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act
New York City Council, Committee on State and Federal Legislation
Monday, May 3, 1:00p

“Ensuring a Strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill Benefits NYC’s Most Vulnerable Children”

*Testimony Submitted by: Rachel Hye Youn Rupright, Child Nutrition Program Specialist
Nutrition Consortium of New York State*

Dear Chairwoman Foster and Members of the New York City Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on how the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act can both continue supporting the federal nutrition assistance programs for children and ensure that these programs reach NYC’s most vulnerable children. The Nutrition Consortium of NYS is a statewide organization whose mission is to alleviate hunger in NYS, by expanding availability of, access to, and use of government nutrition assistance programs. Through outreach, education, and advocacy, we achieve our mission. We engage with children, schools, community-based organizations, fellow advocates, administrating agencies, and elected officials to strengthen and support these programs.

In order to fulfill President Obama’s commitment to end child hunger by 2015, we believe a robust Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill containing significant investments in and improvements to the School Breakfast Program (SBP), National School Lunch Program (NLSP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), WIC, and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) can provide some of the best solutions to achieving the 2015 goal. We commend the New York City Council for convening this hearing to renew a resolution of calling on Congress to renew and strengthen the child nutrition programs.

The federal nutrition assistance programs for children touch thousands of NYC’s low-income children every day. Last year over 635,000 children ate school lunch and nearly 210,000 children ate school breakfast everyday in public schools alone; over 150,000 children ate summer lunch at over 1160 NYC meal sites every day in July; and over 380,000 women, infants, and children participated in WIC throughout the metropolitan area.

As a member of the NYC Alliance for CNR, we recognize these programs not only bolster positive physical, social, and academic well-being in children, but help low-income parents and caregivers stretch their food dollars, augment the existing services of organizations that sponsor the programs, support food service-related jobs, and draw down federal reimbursement to support our local economy. Child nutrition programs are good for our children and greater community.

It is equally important that we build upon success of these programs with a strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill. Our guiding principles, in conjunction with organizations across the country, call for a Reauthorization bill that: 1. strengthens program access and supports participation from underserved children and communities; 2. enhances nutrition quality and providing adequate meal reimbursements; and

3. modernizes technology and simplifies program administration and operation. *In order to meet these three principles, it is critical that Congress provides a Reauthorization bill that matches President Obama's proposed \$1 billion annual funding.* We believe the proposed additional funding can help achieve the following goals in regard to the SBP, NSLP, SFSP, WIC, and CACFP:

Options for Schools to Provide Universally Free School Meals: The process to qualify children for free or reduced-priced school meals is often burdensome to both schools and parents. Establishing a paperless application system where children are served meals at no charge would eliminate this barrier. Several methods of survey and statistical methods have been identified, proposed, and/or piloted: statistical surveys in Philadelphia, calculations based on direct certification for free school meals, and Census data. *The Reauthorization should allow school districts to choose from options to establish universal school meals, with methods that will maximize benefits to both families and school districts.*

Improvements of Direct Certification for Free School Meals: Children already receiving food stamps and/or TANF are automatically eligible to receive free school meals. In NYC, the direct certification process successfully uses data matching between HRA and the Department of Education to identify and qualify these eligible children. *The Reauthorization bill should improve direct certification by expanding data matching to children receiving Medicaid and foster care children.*

Breakfast in the Classroom Initiatives: Numerous studies prove a direct correlation between eating school breakfast and increased student performance. Yet, breakfast participation still remains low in NYC and NYS – often due to stigma, pressure to get to class on time, and conflicting morning schedules. We commend NYC for adopting universal school breakfast in all schools and breakfast in the classroom initiatives in select schools. *The Reauthorization bill should include incentives for more schools to establish breakfast in the classroom methods, including start-up grants for schools.*

Support Grants for Summer Food: SchoolFood is the largest sponsor of summer food in NYC and NYS. However, nearly 100 other community-based organizations, youth programs, and faith-based organizations throughout NYC also operate summer food. *The Reauthorization bill should include funding for sponsors to establish and maintain quality summer meals through efforts such as: site improvement grants, programming activities at meal sites, outreach, and incentives for sponsor retention.*

Third Meal Service Option for Child Care Settings: In a time of extended work hours, non-traditional work hours, and more families relying on child care, CACFP meals are more critical than ever. However, child care settings are limited to claiming reimbursement for two meals only. *The Reauthorization bill should allow child care settings the option to serve a third meal, thus allowing our youngest children proper nutrition for positive growth.*

Continued Quality WIC Services for All Eligible Participants: In order for WIC to continue quality services, it must strengthen program management, improve nutritional services, and advance program technology. *The Reauthorization bill should allow children to certify for up to one year (instead of six months), promote breastfeeding initiatives, and mandate states to adopt electronic benefit transfer implementation within ten years.*

Protection of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education Program (SNAP-Ed) Funding: The Senate Agriculture Committee's version of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act identifies federal nutrition education program funds to support the Reauthorization bill, restructuring the now entitlement program to mandatory funding. NYS draws down SNAP-Ed funds to operate successful nutrition education programs including Eat Smart New York, Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables, and Eat Well Play Hard. By capping this funding for states, programs funded by SNAP-Ed (including over 1600 child care settings throughout NYC and the Food Bank for NYC's CookShop program) could face less funding and a decrease in quality of services. *The Reauthorization bill should find alternative funding sources within each Committee's jurisdiction that does not undermine other nutrition programs.*