

July 13, 2015

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Linda Sánchez
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman DeLauro and Congresswoman Sánchez:

As organizations that envision a nation of healthier children, who are not burdened by obesity and hunger, we offer our strong support for the Wise Investment in Our Children Act, H.R. 2660, a bill to extend the eligibility for children to participate in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) until their 6th birthdays.

For over 40 years, the WIC Program has provided nutritious food and nutrition support services, influencing lifetime nutrition and health behaviors in a targeted, high-risk population of low-income mothers and young children at risk for developing nutrition-related diseases and disorders. Grounded in nutrition science, WIC is an effective program that has resulted in positive outcomes for vulnerable children. WIC children are more likely to consume key nutrients, receive immunizations on time, and have higher cognitive development scores than their peers not participating in WIC. A recent national study documented the reduction in obesity rates in the WIC child population over the past several years.

Currently, WIC provides nutrition services to children only up to a child's 5th birthday, at which point it is assumed that they will enroll in kindergarten and qualify for school meal programs that continue to supplement their intake of healthy foods. However, after they "graduate" from WIC, not all five-year-olds qualify for kindergarten because their birthdays fall after the official cut-off dates set by states or districts. Moreover, some families are advised to delay kindergarten entry until six for various reasons. Local WIC agencies are concerned that this leaves a substantial number of low-income five-year-olds without preventive nutrition services and healthy food for as long as a year – during a critical period of growth and development.

Using the statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics we know that 52% of all children start kindergarten after the age of 5 and a half and 48% of all kindergartners come from households that are less than 199% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). This suggests that there are a significant proportion of children who could have been eligible for WIC until their 5th birthday but due to the WIC cut-off point being five, have spent at least 6 months without nutrition assistance until they enter kindergarten.

The transition from WIC to school shouldn't allow any children to fall through a nutrition crack because of their birth dates and local rules. The Wise Investment in Our Children (WIC) Act, H.R. 2660, addresses this issue by continuing WIC nutrition services for children up to age six and assures that all children continue to be protected by WIC's nutrition safety net until they enter school.

We thank you for your commitment to the health of the nation's children and future by authoring and introducing H.R. 2660. We look forward to working with you to expand access to critical nutrition services to five-year olds.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
Bread for the World
Can Manufacturers Institute
Center for Communications, Health & the Environment (CECHE)
Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)
ChangeLab Solutions
City Harvest
First Focus
Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)
Food Trust
Healthcare Alternative Systems, Inc.
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education, and Policy
March of Dimes
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
MomsRising
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Center for Health Research
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Recreation and Park Association
National WIC Association
Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility
Of United Church of Christ
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Provincial Council of Clerics of St. Viator (Viatorians)
RESULTS: The Power to End Poverty
Shape Up America!
Society for Public Health Education
USAction