

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

March 24, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Vice Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
U.S. Senate

Re: FY 2024 Agriculture Appropriations, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for  
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Dear Chair Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Murray, and Vice Chair Collins:

For nearly fifty years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has proven to be one of the most cost-efficient federal investments. In 2022, WIC experienced unprecedented pressures on program funding, including nationwide shortages of infant formula. Recognizing WIC's proven track record of building a healthier start for America's 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. **We specifically urge \$6.3 billion in WIC budget authority for fiscal year 2024, ongoing authority for the WIC fruit and vegetable bump, clear commitment to the scientific integrity of WIC's food packages, and increased set-aside funding for WIC Management Information Systems.**

Investing in proven, early interventions to 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 disease<sup>1</sup> -- approximately 15.3% of *all* Medicaid and Medicare spending.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> WIC's cost savings are likely even more pronounced, as healthier WIC foods over the past decade contributed to a 9% decline in childhood obesity among WIC-enrolled toddlers.<sup>4</sup>

Consistent with decades of precedent, Congress should ensure adequate funding to support WIC's growing caseload and prevent shortfalls that necessitate waiting lists or other measures that could adversely impact the program's reach and public health impacts. Especially as WIC accounted for 22.3% of discretionary funding in the fiscal year 2023 Agriculture Appropriations bill, **we urge you to consider WIC funding dynamics – including growing participation and unforeseen costs absorbed in fiscal years 2022 and 2023 – in the context of broader allocations across the subcommittees and increase the Agriculture Appropriations allocation accordingly.**

In 2022, WIC navigated extraordinary challenges to sustain the program's nutrition support for an even larger share of the eligible population. Rising food costs presented new challenges for families, but WIC's program structure absorbs these costs for food categories that are issued by quantity (in lieu of a cash-value). The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service estimates that grocery prices increased 11% over the course of 2022, with even more significant increases in critical WIC food categories (*e.g.*, 70% increase to eggs, 16% increase to cereals and whole grains, and 14% increase to dairy products).<sup>5</sup>

WIC food dollars were further depleted to cover the cost of alternative brand infant formulas as the effects of Abbott Nutrition's recall were felt nationwide. Starting in May 2022, WIC funds were used to provide alternative brand options in States that did not contract with Abbott Nutrition.<sup>6</sup> This strategy was effective in mitigating the program-specific effects of the nationwide shortages on WIC participants, but WIC once again absorbed new and unforeseen costs to defray unexpected financial burdens on State governments and WIC participants.

Program costs are also increasing due to higher participation rates, which reflects improvements in service delivery that expands the program's reach and public health impacts. In fiscal year 2022, USDA estimated that 6.26 million participants received WIC services.<sup>7</sup> In the first two months of fiscal year 2023, USDA estimates that WIC participation has increased to 6.37 million individuals.<sup>8</sup> The National WIC Association estimates that an average of 6.5 million participants will be certified for WIC services through fiscal year 2024.

Even with these new funding pressures, **we remain steadfastly in support of the fruit and vegetable increases included in bipartisan appropriations legislation in fiscal years 2022 and 2023.** Appropriators wisely aligned WIC issuance with amounts reported by the National Academies of Sciences that deliver approximately 50% of fruit and vegetable intake recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Initial evidence reported by the National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute identify that WIC's fruit and vegetable bump has already improved fruit and vegetable consumption among WIC-enrolled toddlers, including through purchase of a greater variety of produce.<sup>9</sup> Consistent with prior bipartisan appropriations legislation and USDA's request, Congress should sustain the authority for this fruit and vegetable bump in fiscal year 2024.

USDA wisely incorporated this science-based recommendation and Congressionally-directed adjustment into its recent proposed updates to the broader WIC food packages. Under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, USDA is directed by statute to commission an independent scientific review and adjust issuance to reflect nutrition science, public health concerns, and cultural eating patterns.<sup>10</sup> With limited resources that constitute less than 10% of an average grocery budget, the WIC food packages are carefully crafted to deliver priority nutrients and introduce program participants to a broad range of nutrient-dense foods. **We are opposed to legislative efforts – including riders in the appropriations process – that would undermine the independent, science-based updates to the WIC food packages.** We have confidence that USDA will consider the thoughtful input from a broad range of stakeholders during the public comment period while honoring the independent, science-based recommendations of the National Academies of Sciences.

Congress should maintain longstanding set-asides for breastfeeding peer counselors (\$90 million) and infrastructure (\$14 million) that contribute to WIC's ongoing service model. Additionally, Congress should revitalize the Management Information System (MIS) set-aside authorized under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Updates to WIC's complex computer systems will be essential as the program continues to transition to modern service delivery models, with updates needed to implement the revised food packages, further integrate with healthcare databases, and

scale up new transaction technologies like online and mobile payments. The National WIC Association recommends that Congress institute a \$50 million set-aside for Management Information Systems in fiscal year 2024.

WIC's long record of public health success is well positioned to have broader impacts as the program reaches more eligible families and modernizes its service delivery model to reflect commercial practice in healthcare and retail settings. As Congress begins the process of evaluating fiscal year 2024 appropriations, we urge Congress to renew its ongoing bipartisan commitment to WIC's role in strengthening nutrition security and improving health outcomes that lay the foundation for healthier futures for moms and young children.

Sincerely,

National WIC Association  
1,000 Days, an initiative of FHI Solutions  
A Better Balance  
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
Advocates for Better Children's Diets  
Alliance to End Hunger  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American Heart Association  
American Muslim Health Professionals  
American Society for Nutrition  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials  
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists  
Azimuth Trust  
Baby Café USA  
Bread for the World  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's HealthWatch  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
FARE (Food Allergy Research and Education)  
Farmers Market Coalition  
Feeding America  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)  
Healthy Children Project, Inc.  
Hunger Free America  
ICNA Council for Social Justice  
International Fresh Produce Association  
March of Dimes

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger  
MomsRising  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities  
National Association of Counties (NACo)  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Community Action Partnership  
National League for Nursing  
National Women's Law Center  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Nurse-Family Partnership  
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)  
RESULTS  
Save the Children  
Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)  
Share Our Strength  
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine  
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior  
Society of Behavioral Medicine  
The Arc of the United States  
Trust for America's Health  
U.S. Breastfeeding Committee  
ZERO TO THREE

cc: The Honorable Andy Harris  
The Honorable Sanford Bishop  
The Honorable Martin Heinrich  
The Honorable John Hoeven

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office (2021) *Chronic Health Conditions: Federal Strategy Needed to Coordinate Diet-Related Efforts*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-593>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (2019) *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>.

<sup>3</sup> Nianogo R, et al. (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>.

<sup>4</sup> See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Obesity Among Young Children Enrolled in WIC*. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/obesity-among-WIC-enrolled-young-children.html> (last updated Nov. 8, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. *Food Price Outlook – Consumer Price Index, Changes in Consumer Price Indexes, 2020 through 2023*. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/> (last updated Feb. 23, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> See U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. *Request for Additional WIC Flexibility in Response to the Impact of the Ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic on Nationwide Infant Formula Supply Chain Issues and 2022 Abbott Recall – Medical Documentation for Infants in Food Packages I and II*. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-infant-formula-recall-waiver-medical-documentation-052322.pdf> (May 23, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. *WIC Program Participation and Costs*. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wisummary-2.pdf> (last updated Feb. 10, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. *WIC Data Tables – Monthly Data – State Level Participation by Category and Program Costs: FY 2023 (preliminary)*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program> (last updated Feb. 10, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> National WIC Association & Nutrition Policy Institute (2022) *Multi-State WIC Participant Satisfaction Survey: Cash Value Benefit Increase During COVID*. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/nwa-multi-state-cvb-report-march-2022.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> 42 U.S.C. §1786(f)(1)(C).