

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

As supporters of high-quality child care and early learning programs, we write to urge you to aggressively pursue and reach a bipartisan agreement this calendar year on Child Nutrition Reauthorization and ensure that the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is updated and strengthened to reflect the program's pressing needs.

Members of Congress in both parties have recognized the critical role high-quality child care and early learning programs play in supporting children's healthy development, learning, and school readiness, while also supporting parents' ability to work, train, or pursue an education. CACFP feeds 4.5 million babies and young children in child care centers, Head Start, and family child care programs. Participation in CACFP is a clear indicator of quality in these programs, providing essential nutrition guidance and significant program support for a sector that is underpaid and overworked. Nutrition is critical for babies and young children whose brains and bodies are rapidly developing. With proper nutrition, babies and young children are less likely to experience illness and fatigue and can develop at a normal physical and intellectual pace.

The pandemic waivers and ensuing extensions for area eligibility and temporary increase in CACFP rates have been lifelines for the program and providers. Thank you for your leadership to secure and extend these. Since these waivers are temporary, permanent solutions and improvements are essential now. Further, the last Child Nutrition Reauthorization was more than 10 years ago, and it has been even longer since inequities in CACFP have been addressed. Child care providers are some of the lowest paid workers in our country, earning on average \$13.81 an hour. One in three providers nationally is food insecure. Because CACFP only reimburses for two meals and a snack, participating providers have to pay out of pocket for non-reimbursable meals and snacks. Those additional costs are too much for providers earning low wages and may be food insecure themselves. Most children are in care for a full day and often longer, so additional meals or snacks further cut into providers' lean margins.

This is a particular strain for family child care (FCC) providers, who are paying for non-reimbursed child care meals out of their own pockets while all child care programs are struggling with sky-rocketing food prices. Much of child care is provided by FCC providers who work out of their homes, operate on the slimmest of margins and are themselves likely to be food insecure. One in three providers receives nutrition assistance for their own families. FCC is a critical component of our fragile child care system, serving nearly one-third of infants and toddlers, but economic constraints have resulted in over [10,000](#) FCC closures nationwide from 2019 to 2021 and the loss of more than 46% of FCC providers in CACFP since 1996.

We urge you to continue the effort to strengthen CACFP that has started with the House Education and Labor Committee's passage of the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act, H.R. 8450. Now, the Senate Agriculture Committee needs to take action and produce a bipartisan bill that could pass by year's end. It is critical that the Senate bill include reimbursement for an additional meal or snack.

Thank you for your help to ensure babies and children a healthy start in life and to support child care providers struggling to stay open. We look forward to working with you and as we continue

to address ongoing challenges in child care, including nutrition, and strengthen the system to benefit working families and child care providers.

Sincerely,

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)  
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)