



March 19, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Stacy Dean
Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22302

The Honorable Cindy Long
Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22302

Dear Secretary Vilsack, Deputy Under Secretary Dean, and Administrator Long:

We commend you for your work thus far to ensure that many more children and families experiencing food insecurity during the coronavirus pandemic can access affordable, nutritious food.

We thank you for your recent decision to extend child nutrition waivers to fill summer meal gaps. This is an important step to ensure that an estimated [12 million children](#) who continue to experience food insecurity will have enough food to eat during the summer months. We also applaud the recent enactment of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 that increases investments in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program (Pandemic-EBT). These investments will go a long way to reach more families with children who are struggling to make ends meet with the assistance they need to put food on the table. In addition, the Biden administration's executive actions to end the public charge rule mark an important step for immigrant families to access food without fear.

While these actions are critical to address food insecurity, more work is needed to ensure that all eligible families with children, including Latino and mixed immigrant status families with children, can access food assistance programs and benefits. As COVID-19 continues to exacerbate food insecurity among [Latino](#) and immigrant families, recent federal actions to bolster WIC, SNAP, and P-EBT programs must include culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate outreach, education, and enrollment to ensure that these programs reach all eligible children and families and meet the diverse needs of our communities. In 2017, 25.9 million people reported being limited English proficient (LEP), including 60% who speak

Spanish. Having information in one's preferred language is important to ensure that information is communicated in an accessible way.

In addition, President Biden's reversal of the public charge rule requires investments in culturally competent and linguistically appropriate outreach, education, and enrollment programs that reach all eligible children and families who have lost nutrition support due to fear imposed by the public charge rule. Concerns related to immigration status continue to present a notable barrier to participation in food assistance programs, such as SNAP, among Latino and mixed immigrant status families. According to the American Public Health Association (APHA), recent immigration enforcement and administrative actions contributed to a 10% decrease in eligible SNAP enrollment nationwide and a concurrent increase in [child food insecurity](#) among immigrant families. While 95% of Latino children are U.S. citizens, about half live in a household with at least one noncitizen parent. Ensuring that those in mixed-status households receive information in a way that reflects their unique experiences is important to ensure that all who are eligible for food assistance programs are aware of and can access the necessary support they need, especially during a public health crisis. For these reasons, we urge you take the following actions:

WIC

- Designate a portion of the \$390 million in WIC outreach innovation and program modernization funding to support culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate outreach through state and local community organizations. This can be accomplished through USDA implementing guidance that specifies that expected and allowable funding uses should include state agency regrants to state and local community organizations to conduct outreach to Latino and mixed immigrant status households on WIC eligibility and enrollment. UnidosUS and FRAC state and local groups, as trusted, well-connected organizations, could run effective campaigns and use their *promotores de salud* and community workers as WIC navigators to help families sign up. This could be a key component of the Biden administration's WIC outreach plans. We agree "that connecting more eligible women and young children to WIC is one of the tools to reduce stark racial disparities in maternal and child health." Despite moving quickly to pivot to remote services and increasing participation in many areas, WIC has not been able to reach many of those in need during the pandemic. Joining forces with partner organizations to reach Latino mothers and children will help to overcome some of the current barriers.

SNAP

- Work with states to make greater use of federal reimbursement matching funds to bolster efforts by trusted community-based partners to provide outreach and application assistance to SNAP-eligible people, including Latino and mixed immigrant status families. These families face multiple structural barriers to SNAP participation, including immigration-related concerns, limited language access services, and inadequate community outreach about the program. In heavily immigrant-populated cities like New York City, Latino immigrant enrollment in SNAP dropped nearly 14% from 2018 to 2019, while SNAP enrollment by Latino U.S. citizens also dropped by 6.4% during that period. In addition, we urge you to launch a round of 100% federally funded

competitive SNAP outreach grants to support innovative projects targeted to low-income Latino and other under-participating groups. Such competitive grants were made available by the Clinton and Bush administrations and helped move the needle on SNAP participation rates. These grants would also help reach the estimated four million Latinos who are eligible for SNAP but have not been enrolled in the program.

P-EBT

- Provide leadership, best practices, and sample outreach materials to states to ensure that the State plans achieve the goal of providing benefits to all eligible immigrant families. We also ask that USDA work with states to ensure that they all clearly communicate to immigrant families that use of P-EBT benefits does not impact public charge. This will help states follow the most recent P-EBT guidance that requires State plans to describe how they will serve groups with potential access problems, such as children with limited English proficiency, and to affirm that the State will continue to comply with civil rights requirements to include providing equal access to individuals with disabilities and individuals who are limited English proficient.

We request a meeting with USDA to discuss our recommendations to increase federal food program outreach in Latino and immigrant communities. Targeted investments in Spanish-language and culturally relevant information as well as trusted, [culturally competent](#), and community-based organizations will help reduce long-standing disparities in food access magnified by COVID-19 among Latino and mixed immigrant status households. This will also help ensure that millions of children have access to a basic human need and an opportunity for a bright, healthy, and productive future. To help schedule a meeting, please contact Denise Odell at dodell@frac.org.

We appreciate your consideration of our requests and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Janet Murguía
President and CEO



Luis Guardia
President