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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-0509

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July 15, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

As Chair of the Leader Hoyer Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity, I write to urge that the development of the White House national strategy on hunger and plans for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health are inclusive of constituent input and built from the bottom up. I ask that you use this conference as prime opportunity to deeply examine the root causes of hunger, proclaim structural racism as a barrier to access to nutrition, discuss nutrition-related health disparities, and identify possible solutions. It is critical that the conference serves as a platform to uplift the voices of poor and underserved communities, including communities of color. Furthermore, this conference cannot fail to meet the moment to fix our broken food systems to end hunger and nutrition-related health disparities, expand food infrastructure and agricultural capacity, and promote healthy habits.

Feedback from my constituents has illuminated concerns that the scope of this year's conference broadly focuses on hunger-related issues, identified as the "Five Pillars" but does not specifically target the root causes of hunger and poverty. I urge you to reframe the conference around the root causes of hunger and poverty such as structural racism and other systemic inequities. It is imperative that the conference is a grassroots effort anchored around food insecurity and poverty and include input from anti-hunger advocates, policymakers across all levels of government, partner organizations, and people with lived experiences with hunger.

I reached out to my constituents to hear their lived experiences concerning food insecurity and received over 500 responses. I have also organized a listening session with my constituents on the subject. Through this letter and the attached document, I would like to highlight constituent priorities and share their testimonies to inform the development of the national strategy on hunger and the implementation of the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. Some key themes identified in the constituent testimonies include the need to enhance funding and access to federal nutrition programs, create sustainable food systems, provide

financial relief to counter rising costs of living, and targeted outreach to communities disproportionately impacted by poverty and hunger, among other topics.

Over a half-century has passed since the White House convened a conference to elevate hunger as a national priority. While the last conference sparked major improvements and expansions to federal nutrition programs like SNAP, school meals, and WIC, national food security challenges continue.

Since before the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of Americans experience hunger while many more struggle with diet-related health issues, which disproportionately impact communities of color. Food insecurity affects nearly one in eight Hispanic-headed homes and more than one in five Black-headed homes.¹ Similarly, one in seventeen Asian American-headed homes² and one in four Indigenous Americans³ experience food insecurity.

The devastating impact of food insecurity in America was further magnified by various factors stemming from the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) that disproportionately affected communities of color, especially resulting economic disruptions. Federal relief enacted in reaction to the PHE helped reduce hunger by expanding SNAP benefits. As we approach the “hunger cliff” that looms ahead of the expiration of the federal PHE Declaration, the White House must take comprehensive and swift action to expand access to healthy foods beyond the PHE. This is a matter of survival for too many children and families in this nation.

The conference should also serve as a platform to uplift ongoing legislative efforts to dismantle barriers to access to SNAP and nutrition programs such as H.R. 1753, Improving Access to Nutrition Act and H.R. 4077, Closing the Meal Gap Act. Additionally, proposals such as the implementation of a national *Food as Medicine* pilot program would help expand access to nutrition and reduce chronic health conditions by using certain foods as medicine to improve health outcomes for the underserved.

A national strategy to end hunger must be comprehensive and centered around promoting policies that benefit low- and moderate- income households, as well as improving government support programs. The national hunger strategy must aggressively call for making healthy foods more accessible, expanding federal nutrition programs, and providing targeted support to communities of color that are disproportionately impacted by hunger. This also includes calling for the abolition of the filibuster which prevents the passage of critical policies that would break up the racialized concentration of wealth and resources to truly end hunger by 2030.

Hungry people can’t wait. It is paramount that this year’s White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health be leveraged to take aggressive, much-needed action to end hunger and to uplift those most impacted by food insecurity.

¹ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=102075>

² <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/3-fast-facts-about-hunger-aapi-community-1>

³ <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/2020/11/november-native-american-heritage-month/>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Lee".

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Attachment:
CA-13 Constituent Hunger Survey Results

CC:
Secretary Xavier Becerra
Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack