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May 10, 2023

Docket # FNS-2022-0043

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to you today to express our concerns regarding the proposed rule, "Child Nutrition Programs: Revisions to Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans." The proposed revisions to meal patterns would implement unrealistic standards that would significantly increase costs, further burdening schools and school personnel.

School cafeterias are facing a time of intense difficulty. As a result of the inflation inflicted on the economy by the Biden administration's policies, escalating food costs are disrupting school meal service. From January 2022 to January 2023, schools' food prices have increased more than 300 percent.¹ This creates an undue burden on schools who are trying their best to serve healthy meals to their students.

In addition to skyrocketing costs, the proposed revisions to meal patterns would also lead to increased complexity in purchasing and receiving food items. The new added sugar standards and reduced sodium limits would decrease the number of menu options schools could purchase and force schools to compete against each other for a limited supply of specialized foods. Increased competition, coupled with a continuing nationwide truck driver shortage, would only worsen the hurdles schools currently face in securing a dependable food supply that meets very prescriptive standards.² In addition, the proposed revisions to meal patterns would force school nutrition professionals to evaluate sources of naturally occurring sodium, such as those found in grains and cheese. In a recent School Nutrition Association survey, nearly 90 percent of respondents cited challenges in obtaining sufficient menu items to meet current standards, while almost 100 percent expressed sincere concerns regarding the availability of foods that will meet

¹ <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CUSR0000SSFV031A>

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/economy/food-prices-k-12-schools-inflation-rcna70863>

the transitional sodium limits and be well accepted by students.³ Increasing the complexities of an already strenuous job is uncalled for, particularly when it curtails schools' ability to get nourishing food to their students.

The proposed rule is estimated to result in additional expenditures of \$1.4 billion over six school years.⁴ Almost 100 percent of respondents in the School Nutrition Association survey indicated increasing costs are a severe challenge for their school nutrition program.⁵ With districts already facing steep costs, they cannot be expected to take on even more debt. We all want children to consume healthy and nutritious meals. However, this proposed rule forces unrealistic standards upon schools without evidence of any desired benefit.

Washington bureaucrats often believe they have a better understanding of what our children need than parents and local communities do, but mandates from Washington must be informed by what students will actually consume. The proposed meal standards are not feasible. School nutrition professionals know our children best, and we must heed their concerns.

We ask you to reevaluate these meal standards and provide more flexibility for school food service providers. They are the experts who know what our children need most in a healthy school meal.

Sincerely,



Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
U.S. House Committee on
Education and the Workforce




Glenn Thompson
Member of Congress



Tim Walberg
Member of Congress



Elise Stefanik
Member of Congress



Rick Allen
Member of Congress



Jim Banks
Member of Congress

³ <https://schoolnutrition.org/sna-news/sna-survey-shows-school-meal-programs-face-critical-challenges/>

⁴ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/02/07/2023-02102/child-nutrition-programs-revisions-to-meal-patterns-consistent-with-the-2020-dietary-guidelines-for>

⁵ <https://schoolnutrition.org/sna-news/sna-survey-shows-school-meal-programs-face-critical-challenges/>



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