



July 28, 2022

Representative Barbara Lee
Representative Eric Swalwell
Representative Ro Khanna

Re: Support Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act

Dear Alameda County Delegation,

First 5 Alameda County urges Congress to act swiftly and support the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act to help increase access to federal child nutrition programs. These investments will help address the rising rates of child hunger, improve the health of children and families, and support learning. We are excited about the provisions included to ensure children have access to healthy meals year-round, including the provisions that authorize Summer EBT, improve access and participation in summer meals, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program.

We ask for your commitment in supporting this comprehensive child nutrition reauthorization bill designed to strengthen critical supports for our community.

A few provisions we are excited to support include:

- **Allow for an additional reimbursable meal** for children in a full day of care, helping to provide the full complement of meals young children need to grow and thrive;
- **Improve reimbursement rate adjustments** for child care home providers by using the Consumer Price Index for food away from home to calculate the adjustment, helping to make sure reimbursement keeps up with the cost of providing a healthy CACFP meal;
- **Simplify eligibility** for proprietary (for-profit) child care centers by allowing annual eligibility, in alignment with other child care centers;
- **Modernize the WIC program** by requiring WIC clinics to offer services over the phone and via video options and allow remote benefit issuance; and
- **Extend WIC benefits** to children up to 6 years old, and extend certification periods to two years for infants, children, and postpartum individuals.

Our mission at First 5 Alameda County is to continually invest and innovate to support young children and their families and caregivers. Healthy thriving communities are crucial for developing young minds and family well-being. Findings from our 2021/22 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, a participatory research project that **surveyed over 3000 parents/caregivers, early care and education professionals, TK and Kindergarten teachers in Alameda County**, show that *child health and well-being is associated with school readiness*.



Among the included recommendations for supporting kindergarten readiness are efforts to increase children's access to quality meals:

- 1) **Continue policies that were implemented during the pandemic** to improve access to quality services including continuous eligibility, free quality school meals to all children, and flexible redetermination processes for CalFresh and WIC; and
- 2) Increase **child care-based food programs**, to support provider and family food security and conditions that support learning.

We are grateful for your continued leadership and support for children, families, and communities. Federal child nutrition investments are essential for building a strong foundation for today's children and our country's future. We ask for your support in passing a comprehensive child nutrition reauthorization bill.

Sincerely,

Kristin Spanos

Kristin Spanos
Chief Executive Officer
First 5 Alameda County