

January 16, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
U.S. House Appropriations Committee
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
U.S. House Appropriations Committee
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chairwoman Granger, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As supporters of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the results it achieves, we strongly urge Congress to ensure WIC has the needed funds to ensure that all eligible women, infants, and children who wish to enroll can be served by the program. Funding the WIC program to meet the unexpected increase in participation will build upon the more than 25 years of bipartisan support for healthier outcomes for nutritionally at-risk mothers and young children across the country while also reducing healthcare costs and promoting local economies. Our organizations – representing farmers, producers, manufacturers, and food retailers – respectfully request your consideration of the additional funding USDA needs to ensure access to WIC remains uninterrupted in fiscal year (FY) 2024.

WIC participation is now rising after a decade of declined enrollment. At the end of 2022, WIC provided assistance to 6.3 million women, infants, and children. In March 2023, the Administration requested \$6.3 billion for WIC for the upcoming fiscal year, anticipating an increase in participation through FY 2024 to 6.5 million participants. In the following months, participation data showed enrollment rapidly rising to 6.7 million participants, significantly higher than anticipated. As a result, USDA indicated an additional \$1 billion in funding would be needed to appropriately serve 6.7 million mothers, infants, and children in the program.

WIC mothers and babies are at nutritional risk during important times of growth and development and benefit from the targeted support provided by WIC benefits, which include supplemental nutritious foods as well as infant formula, nutrition education and counseling, breastfeeding support, and health care referrals. The WIC food package provides quantities of specific foods and infant formulas tailored to participants to meet specific nutritional and dietary needs for each stage of life. These highly nutritious foods are widely available and commonly consumed. Additional funding will enable WIC to continue to provide the full food package that is built on evidence-based recommendations and promotes alignment with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

The WIC food package not only provides nutritional benefits to participants, but also provides economic benefits to local producers, farmers, distributors, food retailers and communities across the nation. In one month alone, redemption of WIC foods drove more than \$500 million in purchases across the United States¹. When WIC families use their supplemental benefits to purchase staples like dairy, eggs, seafood, fruit and vegetables, and whole grains every month, it benefits local economies and supports local businesses in the food supply chain.

The WIC program has demonstrated meaningful public health impacts over the decades, delivering vital nutrition support and improving overall health outcomes. According to the National WIC Association, research into WIC outcomes² shows it reduces infant mortality significantly, reduces healthcare costs – saving more than double per every dollar spent– and supports WIC families’ access to dairy foods, addressing public health concerns that Americans are not meeting dairy recommendations³. Increases in fruit and vegetable benefits have also resulted in a significant increase in produce consumption among participating children², addressing a key dietary concern raised by the Centers for Disease Control and highlighting the importance of maintaining current fruit and vegetable benefit levels.

A significant funding shortfall will impact access to nutritional benefits for new parents wanting to enroll newborn children and those who remain eligible and wish to renew their benefits. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that nationwide, over 2 million eligible women, children, and infants could be turned away from WIC by September 2024 without additional funding⁴. We are told that these impacts may be felt as early as March in some states.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent need and stand ready to help as partners of the WIC program. The investment we make now will improve the future nutrition, health, and lives of so many for years to come.

Sincerely,

Ahold Delhaize USA
American Bakers Association
American Frozen Food Institute
Consumer Brands Association
Danone North America
FMI- The Food Industry Association
General Mills, Inc.
International Dairy Foods Association
International Fresh Produce Association
National Grocers Association
National Milk Producers Federation
Sustainable Food Policy Alliance

CC: U.S. Senate and House Appropriations Committees
U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee
U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee

¹ National WIC Association. (2023) *State by State: How much \$\$ does WIC drive to Grocery Stores?*
<https://media.nwica.org/wic%20state-by-state%20grocery%20stores.pdf>

² National WIC Association. (2023) *WIC's proven outcomes help grow a healthier next generation.*
<https://media.nwica.org/proven-outcomes.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020.* <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/>

⁴ Bergh, Katie, Hall, Lauren, Neuberger, Zoe. (2023). Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. *About 2 Million Parents and Young Children Could Be Turned Away From WIC by September Without Full Funding.*
<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/about-2-million-parents-and-young-children-could-be-turned-away-from-wic>