

September 27, 2023

The Honorable Charles Schumer
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House of Representatives
326 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U. S. Senate
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
U.S. House of Representatives
1607 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Majority Leader McCarthy and Minority Leader Jeffries:

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides crucial nutritional assistance for millions of America's most vulnerable children and their mothers. Despite a decades-long bipartisan agreement to fully fund the program, both the House and Senate bills fail to adequately fund WIC and could put children's health and wellbeing at risk. Now, we are facing a lapse in funding for many government programs and services, including WIC. Congress must act immediately to pass the Senate's continuing resolution to avoid a government shutdown and provide the WIC program some operational flexibility in the short term, but it is imperative that Congress work quickly to fully fund WIC to prevent harmful impacts for those women and children who rely on its support.

For over fifty years, the WIC program has been one of the most essential federal programs in giving low-income pregnant women, postpartum and breastfeeding individuals, infants, and children at nutritional risk a better start in life. WIC provides over 6.7 million mothers and children access to nutritious foods, counseling on healthy eating, and breastfeeding support. A vast body of research confirms that properly nourished children not only have better health outcomes but more actively participate at school, and have better focus and information retention. Children who eat poorly suffer not only from chronic diseases like obesity, type 2 diabetes, and tooth decay, but also face a lifetime of challenges caused by inadequate access to proper nutrition, including behavioral problems, depression, low self-esteem, and failure to thrive at school.

For nearly 30 years, Congress has fully funded WIC annually, to support every eligible woman, infant, and child who seeks WIC services. However, both the House and Senate spending bills fall short of fully funding the program. The House's bill would slash WIC's Cash Value Benefit,

cutting fruit and vegetable issuance by 56% for kids and 70% for pregnant and postpartum participants, and force 600,000 women and children onto waiting lists with potentially devastating health consequences.

A government shutdown would have devastating impacts for WIC participants, particularly if the shutdown is a protracted one. During the shutdown, WIC funds will mostly come from limited remaining state funds, which means that some states' participants would lose benefits far sooner than others. In addition, given the confusing nature of the situation, many recipients may assume they have no benefits and may miss recertification appointments, fail to pick up EBT cards, or stop using benefits for fear that they no longer qualify or will take them away from someone else. This slow dwindling of participation could reverse a multi-year trend where WIC has increasingly reached more eligible families.

America's children and mothers need WIC. We urge Congress to pass the Senate's proposed continuing resolution without delay to avert a government shutdown and the hardships it would bring to many children and families and quickly move the FY2024 annual spending bills to ensure WIC is fully funded to help protect the health and well-being of infants, children, and mothers across the country.

Sincerely,

Child and Student Nutrition Alliance
First Focus Campaign for Children
Hunger Free Colorado
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National League for Nursing
UnidosUS