

August 5, 2022

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer and Chairwoman Stabenow,

As the Senate is poised to consider the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), we urge you to prioritize the food and nutritional security of America's children. In a matter of days, students will be back in school with no guaranteed access to a school meal for the 2022-23 school year. We respectfully request that you consider the following three proposals which would help ensure that all students have access to nutritious, high-quality school-based meals.

First, Congress has the opportunity in the IRA to address both student hunger and inflation in a meaningful way for American families by extending waivers that allow schools to offer free meals to all students through the 2022-23 school year. Congress took an important step to address the myriad crises facing students by passing the bipartisan Keep Kids Fed Act in June, which provided an essential lifeline to districts and schools to prevent food insecurity for millions of students throughout the summer months. Unfortunately, this critical legislation was only able to extend certain flexibilities through the summer months, rather than through the end of the 2022-23 school year. Extending these waivers through the 2022-23 school year would provide schools with the flexibility necessary to provide millions of children access to school and summer meals at no or low cost, providing critical nutrition and sustenance that are essential for students to learn and thrive. As a result of these flexibilities, an additional [10 million students](#) received access to free school meals every day over the course of the pandemic.

Second, we urge you to expand community eligibility, which enables eligible schools to offer free school breakfast and lunch to all students. Community eligibility has been a powerful tool to help address student hunger and food insecurity, particularly for underserved students. Furthermore, community eligibility reduces burdensome paperwork for schools and families, and eliminates unpaid school meal fees. To increase the number of high-poverty schools that are eligible for community eligibility, the IRA should include provisions that lower the eligibility threshold, increase funding, and create a statewide community eligibility option.

Third, Congress should authorize within the IRA a permanent, nationwide, and fully funded Summer-EBT program. As is [well-documented](#), summer is the hungriest time of year for millions of students who depend on school meals, including students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Expanding Summer-EBT has been [shown](#) to reduce food insecurity by almost 30 percent and increase access to healthy food for students. Creating a permanent, nationwide, and fully funded Summer-EBT program through the IRA would be a powerful, proven approach to reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition.

As our nation faces record high inflation, supply chain disruptions, and skyrocketing food prices, we urge you to invest in kids by giving schools the flexibilities and resources they need to meet the nutritional needs of their students. Thank you for your consideration of these proposals and for your continued commitment to the well-being of all our nation's students.

Sincerely,

First Focus on Children
The Education Trust