

May 15, 2018

Rep. Pete Sessions
Chair, House Committee on Rules
2233 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-4332

Rep. Jim McGovern
Ranking Member, House Committee on Rules
438 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Sessions and Ranking Member McGovern,

As organizations committed to improving the health, nutrition, education, and wellbeing of children, we write in opposition to proposed amendments to H.R. 2, the “Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018” that would undermine the evidence-based nutrition standards for meals, foods, and beverages sold in schools. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) updated the current standards for school meals and competitive foods in schools—those foods and beverages sold to students in schools outside of the federally reimbursable meal, such as in vending machines—based on rigorous, evidence-based rule-making processes as required by the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. These standards rely on expert, nonpartisan recommendations from the Institute of Medicine, now known as the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, and are consistent with the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). Proposed amendments to roll back these standards—such as Amendments 73 and 81—would undermine the robust, scientific foundation on which the current standards are built.

For nearly a decade, schools have been preparing for and are now successfully implementing these standards. Industry has invested millions of dollars in reformulating products that meet these standards. The food industry needs reasonable consistency and certainty of regulatory requirements to enable them to continue successfully supporting the meal patterns and nutrition standards. By USDA’s own data, more than 99 percent of schools are successfully meeting these nutrition goals. Nine out of ten Americans support serving these healthier foods to kids in school, demonstrating widespread support – especially from parents. **We oppose efforts from Congress to burden schools with unnecessary and confusing uncertainty in meal programs and jeopardize the progress schools have made toward serving healthier meals, snacks, and beverages for children.**

Improved school nutrition is critical given that one out of three children and adolescents aged 2 to 19 years is overweight or have obesity, and children consume one-third to one-half of daily calories during the school day. The Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health concluded that the update to school nutrition standards is “one of the most important national obesity prevention policy achievements in recent decades.” Researchers estimate that these

improvements prevent more than two million cases of childhood obesity and save up to \$792 million in health-care related costs over ten years. A May 2014 Harvard School of Public Health study shows that children are now eating 16 percent more vegetables and 23 percent more fruit at lunch. A study released in March 2015 by the University of Connecticut's Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity found that students are eating more nutritious foods and discarding less of their lunches under the healthier standards.

School lunch revenue can also increase with healthier school food. A study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that schools that implemented healthier nutrition standards for meals and snacks reported revenues rebounding to original profits two years after the updated standards went into effect (in 2014) and participation in the school meals program rose significantly among students from low-income families during the same period. Additional studies show that plate waste has either remained the same or decreased since the updated school nutrition standards.

USDA has already undertaken a process to provide flexibility to nutrition program operators for this coming school year and proposed further changes for future school years. USDA published an Interim Final Rule (IFR) on November 30, 2017 that delayed the next phase of sodium reduction in school meals, continued the allowance of waivers for the whole-grain requirements, and allowed flavored low-fat (one percent) milk for school meals and competitive foods. From our estimates, USDA received more than 80,000 comments opposing these changes. In addition, more than 50 health and child welfare organizations and more than 50 scientists and academics similarly opposed these changes. Sixty percent of Americans also oppose rolling back school nutrition, according to a national 2018 poll released by the Center for Science in the Public Interest. **The fact that these changes are already underway makes it unnecessary for Congress to pursue legislative action. In addition, amendments such as these should be debated and voted on first in the committee of jurisdiction.**

In the interest of the health of our nation's children and their future success, including many children in our most vulnerable communities, we urge members to vote against these amendments and to stand by the current science-based efforts that have improved the school meals and foods for millions of American children.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Diabetes Association
American Heart Association
American Public Health Association
Center for Science in the Public Interest
ChangeLab Solutions
Chicago Public Schools
Consumer Federation of America

Farm Sanctuary
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food Policy Action
FoodCorps
Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University
Healthy School Food Maryland
Healthy Schools Campaign
National Consumers League
National Education Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nemours Children's Health System
Orange County Food Access Coalition
Real Food for Kids
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Fresh Produce Association

CC: Speaker Ryan, Rep. Pelosi, Rep. McCarthy, Rep. Conaway, Rep. Peterson, Rep. Foxx, Rep. Scott