

November 15, 2008

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Maria Cantwell,

As a dietetic intern submerged in organizations related to federal child nutrition programs, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the 2009 Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Programs and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC). The reauthorization of these programs provides the vital opportunity to make changes necessary to support the optimal operation of existing programs, as well as renew programs approaching expiration. The declining health status of children is paired with an equally alarming increase in chronic disease; therefore the functioning of effective child nutrition programs is undoubtedly a crucial step in addressing this health crisis.

I experienced the limitations of these existing programs firsthand during a recent internship rotation when asked to develop a whole foods menu item for incorporation into the lunch menu. From procurement through production, extensive and thorough efforts were made to produce a quality, cost-effective and appealing menu item. Unfortunately limiting factors embedded within the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (NSBP) restricted the likelihood of my menu item's success. Based on this experience and my knowledge of these programs, I support the following recommendations for the NSLP and NSBP:

- Increase cash meal reimbursements to enable and expand the purchasing of food to include quality, whole, nutritious foods;
- Apply uniform nutrition standards to include production standards consistent with sustainable farming to all foods sold in schools;
- Increase the funding necessary to support the incorporation of whole foods into schools, including staff training and kitchen renovations; and
- Increase the funding to implement or sustain garden programs.

Not only was I able to experience school nutrition programs via participation in the kitchen, I was fortunate to have observed the widespread benefits attained by students in Gildo Rey Elementary, a school presently receiving a grant through the Local Farms Healthy Kids Legislation (HB 2798). After witnessing the impressive operation and otherwise absent nutrition and education offerings as a result of this grant, I suggest the following regarding the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP):

- Expand FFVP nationwide to provide fresh fruits and vegetable programs in all schools to all students;
- Apply uniform nutrition standards to include U.S. Dietary Guidelines, production standards consistent with sustainable farming, and require 10% of food be local/regional food to FFVP; and
- Increase the funding necessary to support the FFVP, including staff training and kitchen renovations.

In addition to witnessing the needed changes in the permanently authorized programs, during my rotation at a local WIC center (which coincided with Washington public health program funding cuts), I foresaw the anxiety and struggles that would result from the discontinuation of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC). Honestly astonished by how many clients were served

utilizing minimal resources, I was equally optimistic how the quality and expansion of care could be improved and achieved by altering federal strategies. Based on the combination of my experience and knowledge of the program, I support these recommendations for the WIC program:

- Increase the funding to serve all participant categories;
- Increase funding and support for breastfeeding education and promotion as the most healthy and sustainable way to feed baby; and
- Encourage participants to purchase sustainable produce, including locally-grown and organic fruits and vegetables with vouchers.

Child nutrition programs that address public need, evolve to reflect present and accurate program intentions, and most critically actively support the intended direction of child health trends are needed more now than at any other time in our nation's history. Therefore, I urge you to contribute and aid in the successful implementation of the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tarynne Mingione,  
Bastyr University Dietetic Intern