

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1104

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY &  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS &  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

May 2, 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20250

**RE: Comment Letter on Proposed Rule – “Child Nutrition Programs: Community Eligibility Provision – Increasing Options for Schools” (FNS-2022-0044)**

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your continued commitment to feeding our nation's students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Biden-Harris administration's dedication to making sure all students are fed has helped to ensure working and middle class families have reliable access to healthy meals during this difficult time. I write today to express my strong support for the administration's proposed rule to further expand access to healthy meals through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Nationally, CEP has been an effective way for states and schools to provide healthy meals to students in order to “combat child hunger in high poverty areas, while reducing administrative burden and increasing program efficiency... to offer school meals to all students at no cost.”<sup>1</sup> Last year, the Food Research and Action Center reported that 16.2 million children attend 33,300 schools that have adopted CEP, including 48,900 children who attend 106 schools in Hawaii. Such success warrants a further expansion of the program.

The administration's proposal to further expand access to healthy meals through CEP would ensure more students from working and middle class families are fed. By lowering CEP's minimum identified student percentage (ISP) participation threshold, the proposal would allow more schools to receive the benefits of the program, which, as the administration has highlighted in the proposal, include “[increasing] access to meals at no cost, eliminating unpaid meal

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<sup>1</sup> “Child Nutrition Programs: Community Eligibility Provision – Increasing Options for Schools” 88 FR 17406 (March 23, 2023) (to be codified at 7 CFR 245).

charges, minimizing stigma, reducing paperwork for school nutrition staff and families, and streamlining meal service operations.”<sup>2</sup>

USDA’s proposal represents a small but important step toward ensuring all our nation’s students have reliable access to healthy meals – regardless of where they live. Thank you again for your commitment to feeding our students. I look forward to seeing this proposal move forward through the process.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

CC: Michelle Frey, Branch Chief, Policy Design Branch, School Meals Policy Division, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA)

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.