

January 29, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader McConnell:

As the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress begins consideration of additional COVID-19 recovery legislation, we strongly urge inclusion of \$3 billion in multi-year funding to strengthen the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), including short-term flexibility to enhance WIC's Cash Value Benefit for fruit and vegetable purchases. President Biden's proposed \$3 billion in WIC funding is a sorely needed step to both deliver immediate relief for new and expectant parents and a timely investment in the known long-term health successes of this effective federal program. It is a win/win/win for America's families, farmers, and retailers.

WIC is the nation's leading public health nutrition program, serving the needs of 6.3 million pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children under age 5. WIC's demonstrated public health success improves pregnancy and birth outcomes, enhances breastfeeding rates, and reduces the prevalence of childhood obesity – measurable health outcomes that return at least \$2.48 in healthcare cost savings for every dollar spent on WIC services. Despite this demonstrated effectiveness, only 51% of eligible individuals are certified to receive WIC services. While participation is increasing during the pandemic, WIC would have a more profound impact on health outcomes if all eligible families were connected with services.

President Biden's proposed multi-year investment can make all the difference. State and local WIC agencies, medical providers, and non-profit community partners report a wide range of factors that affect a family's decision whether to participate in WIC. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) must be equipped with the resources and flexibility to address this participation gap head-on, prioritizing a national-scale response that connects eligible individuals with services to help families choose healthier food options for their children.

The President's proposal will allow additional flexibility, empowering USDA to increase the Cash Value Benefit for fruit and vegetable purchases – a bipartisan step that benefits WIC families, retailers, and producers. Last year, Representatives Kim Schrier (D-WA) and Ron Wright (R-TX) introduced the COVID-19 WIC Benefit Flexibility Act, which would temporarily increase the Cash Value Benefit for all participants to \$35 per month from its current level of \$9 for children and \$11 for women. This measure is drawn from 2017 recommendations from a Congressionally-mandated report from the National

Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), which encouraged higher value to ensure participants could realistically access a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Especially in a time of crisis, \$2.25 per week is not enough to assure access to nutritious foods.

This provision also has the added benefit of supporting producers and other stakeholders in the food supply chain, who have been adversely affected by the pandemic's impact on restaurants, schools, and other consumers. The Cash Value Benefit is consistently one of the most redeemed elements of the WIC food package, assuring that a higher-value benefit will have a positive impact on WIC's agriculture and business stakeholders. Although USDA has the authority to reevaluate the food package in a formal rulemaking process, it lacks emergency authority to responsively adjust benefit levels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

WIC's well-documented successes in shaping healthier outcomes for babies and young children demands that we invest now for our country's health and future. By assuring greater access to nutritious foods during the pandemic, we are building a stronger program that will reach more moms, babies, and young children. We look forward to working with you to deliver these critical provisions in the forthcoming recovery package.

Sincerely,

National WIC Association  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
United Fresh Produce Association

cc: The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
The Honorable John Boozman  
The Honorable Robert C. Scott  
The Honorable Virginia Foxx