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June 23, 2022

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 3 million members of National Education Association, who educate and support 50 million students in 14,000 communities across America, we urge you to support/vote YES on the Keep Kids Fed Act (Amendment to S. 2089). Votes on this legislation, which passed by an overwhelming margin earlier today in the House of Representatives, may be included in the NEA Report Card for the 117th Congress.

The educators of NEA know from experience that when students have access to school meals programs, their behavior, comprehension, and attendance improve. Healthy meals not only prepare students for learning, but for the recreational activities, sports, and play that are important to their development and are the ingredients of a full life.

Staff shortages, supply chain issues, and rising food prices have made it difficult for schools and other child nutrition providers to meet their ongoing program needs reliably and consistently. Of course, these are the very issues that underscore many families' need for access to nutritious meals in school, at summer programs, and in childcare settings.

As you know, the child nutrition waivers are set to expire on June 30, and although this bill provides only temporary relief, we believe it is a critical first step in assisting families, especially in alleviating hunger this summer.

The bipartisan Keep Kids Fed Act will provide some relief to summer food providers, schools, childcare providers, students, and struggling families as they deal with issues related to the ongoing pandemic.

However, we believe it is inappropriate that funding for the bill would come from specific relief provided to colleges and universities to provide direct aid to students for food, housing, healthcare, tuition, and other emergency costs, and to reimburse campuses for revenues they have lost because of the pandemic. Some of the funds have not yet been obligated, but that does not mean there is no need or plan to use them—especially since pandemic-related challenges continue to impact campuses and students.

We urge you to pass the Keep Kids Fed Act quickly in order to grant summer providers the assistance they need, and we look forward to working with you to extend the waivers for school meals into the 2022-23 school year. Beyond that, we ask that you make long-term improvements to child nutrition programs to ensure that no child goes hungry in America, and that every child arrives in school ready, eager, and energized to learn.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association