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Education and Labor Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who include the dedicated professionals that prepare and serve healthy school meals to students, we appreciate this opportunity to offer comments for markup of the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act (H.R. 8450) and urge you to vote YES on this important bill. Votes on this issue may be included in the NEA Report Card on the 117th Congress.

We believe that all students deserve healthy, nutritious school meals that will prepare them to learn, give them the energy to participate in classroom and school activities, and place them on the path to success. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis worsened the widespread childhood hunger that already existed in our nation before the pandemic, particularly in Black and Hispanic households, where rates of food insecurity are twice that of rates in white households.

At the height of the pandemic, food service professionals managed to provide school meals to children in a variety of circumstances and communities, despite the tremendous challenges they faced. The Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act builds on these laudable efforts. The legislation capitalizes on what was learned and achieved, takes a major step toward eliminating child hunger, and includes all of NEA's major requests for child nutrition reauthorization.

The Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act:

- **Expands Access to School Meals by:**
  - Increasing the number of high-poverty schools eligible to offer free meals to all students via the **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)**
  - addressing **school meal debt and shaming**
  - increasing the number of low-income students who are **directly certified for free school meals**
- **Supports Schools and School Food Service Professionals by:**
  - Including bipartisan language that provides **professional development and training** for school food service professionals at no cost to them, during regular, paid working hours; and includes additional employee protections
  - Providing grants to purchase kitchen equipment to help school food service professionals prepare healthy school meals
- **Improves Nutrition for Students by:**
  - Strengthening the healthy guidelines for school meals, incentivizing scratch cooking, and furthering investments in the Farm to School Program

- **Expands Access to Summer Food and Out-of-School Time Programs by:**
  - Improving area eligibility for traditional **summer food programs** that are connected to educational, enrichment, and recreational activities so more low-income children can receive meals during the summer and after school, allowing sites to serve three meals a day, and allowing providers to serve meals seamlessly throughout the year
  - Making the **Summer EBT** program national and permanent, providing an important, necessary, and convenient way for families with low-incomes to fill the summer hunger gap for children without access to traditional summer food programs.

In addition to supporting these crucial provisions, we ask that you **support** any amendments to the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act that expand access to school meals, strengthen nutrition standards, and strengthen training and other protections for school food service employees. Please **oppose** any amendments that weaken school food programs and nutrition standards, limit worker protections, or weaken traditional summer food programs.

NEA members know that when students participate in school meals programs, their behavior, comprehension, and attendance improve. The meals children receive get them ready to learn, shape food choices throughout their lives, and affect their health outcomes as adults. We support the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act because it helps ensure our students have a solid foundation to build on, and provides school food-service professionals with the training and kitchen equipment that will enable them to serve healthful meals.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association