



1201 16th St, N.W. | Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: (202) 833-4000

Rebecca S. Pringle
President

Princess R. Moss
Vice President

Noel Candelaria
Secretary-Treasurer

Kim A. Anderson
Executive Director

July 25, 2023

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who teach and support nearly 50 million students in public schools across America, we urge you to vote NO on the FY 2024 Agriculture Appropriations bill. Votes on this legislation may be included in the NEA Report Card for the 118th Congress.

Despite their best efforts, many working families are falling further behind, confronted by forces—including supply chain issues and high food prices—that are far beyond their control. Congress should strengthen America’s food assistance programs at this time, but the House bill instead would cut critical federal nutrition programs to their lowest funding allocations in nearly 20 years. Additionally, the bill attempts to block the U.S. Department of Agriculture from implementing healthier standards for school meals, and cuts important grant funding for school cafeterias.

NEA members oppose this bill because many of its components would worsen food insecurity and poverty, especially in the following areas:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP, our nation’s largest federal food assistance program and the first line of defense against childhood hunger, is crucial to people in communities of all kinds, across all regions. The overwhelming majority of SNAP households include a child, a person 60 or over, or someone with disabilities. Despite the program’s broad reach and the obvious need for it, the bill would increase the age of unemployed and underemployed adults who face arbitrary three-month time limits on SNAP eligibility, from 18 to 56, unless they document sufficient work hours. This would put hundreds of thousands of SNAP recipients at risk of losing benefits they depend on.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The bill slashes funding for the WIC program by \$800 million, threatening the health of babies, young children, and mothers. The proposal obliterates the increase in fruit and vegetable benefits recommended by the [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#), and would impact 6 million pregnant women, mothers, and children.

School Breakfast Program

The expansion of free school meals from March 2020 through June 2022 led to a decrease in childhood hunger during the first two years of the pandemic. According to the [Census Bureau](#), food insecurity fell by about 7 percentage points between the start of the pandemic in 2020 and the summer of 2021—a direct result of broadened access to school meals. But rather than build on this success, the bill cuts funding that would expand the School Breakfast Program.

School Nutrition Standards

The bill blocks the Department of Agriculture from implementing healthier standards for school meals unless certain conditions are met, despite researchers' findings that these meals are the [healthiest source of nutrition for children](#). The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act's standards have increased access to healthy foods, helped address nutrition shortfalls, and cultivated healthy eating habits in children. Yet, the Appropriations bill would keep the USDA from building upon these standards.

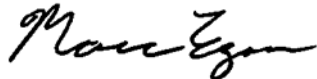
School Cafeterias and Farm-to-School Programs

The bill cuts funding for school meal equipment grants, technical assistance, and Farm to School grants at a time when schools need these resources to cope with the continuing fallout from the end of pandemic-related expansion of school meals.

In addition, the bill would block the Food and Drug Administration from moving forward with proposals to prohibit menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars and to limit nicotine in cigarettes to non-addictive or minimally addictive levels. The proposals aimed at reducing tobacco use would help prevent 33 million youth and young adults from becoming regular smokers and save more than 8 million lives in this century, according to the [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#).

As teachers and education support professionals, NEA members know firsthand that hungry students cannot focus on learning, and they understand the financial challenges many working people face as they struggle to provide for their families. They also oppose efforts to undercut programs aimed at sparing children from becoming addicted to tobacco products. We urge you to vote NO on the Agriculture Appropriations bill because it fails to provide the assistance that working families need during difficult times and undercuts efforts aimed at keeping youth free from tobacco addiction. Additionally, oppose and vote NO on all amendments that would weaken any of our nation's federal nutrition programs or reduce benefits for their participants.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association