October 7, 2016

The Honorable Diana DeGette
United States House of Representatives
2368 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ms. DeGette,

Thank you for opposing the "Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016" (H.R. 5003). As you know, our child nutrition programs provide kids with the nutritious meals they need in order to grow up healthy and succeed academically. We write to express our strong opposition to the block grant provision included in H.R. 5003. Part of the success of these programs is rooted in how they are financed and administered as a reimbursement for meals served, allowing them to respond to increases in need. Undercutting that success with a block grant system would move the recent child nutrition successes backward. If the bill should make it to the House floor, we urge you to vote no on H.R. 5003 and ask your colleagues to do the same, as we are particularly concerned with the block grant provision.

The three-state block grant proposal in H.R. 5003 would immediately cut the funding to operate the school nutrition programs in those states. It would eliminate the additional 6 cent reimbursement that 98 percent of school districts receive for meeting the improved nutrition standards. Funding would also be capped at the fiscal year 2016 funding level, and wouldn't adjust with inflation, recession or population growth. In Colorado, the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch increased by 8 percent, or 27,000 students, in the past five years alone.[1] With funding capped, Colorado's ability to serve low-income children would erode and the state would face an unfunded mandate to respond to any increase in need.

Furthermore, the meals would no longer have to meet consistent nutrition standards. The current standards would be reduced to the simple requirement that meals be "healthy." This would create a patchwork of standards that seriously diminishes the school meals programs' ability to promote good nutrition and improve child health outcomes, and it would make it difficult for schools to procure the food needed.

There would be no requirement that children have access to both school breakfast and lunch, something schools in Colorado have worked hard to offer. Studies have shown that positive effects of breakfast include students' increased recall, episodic memory, short and long term-term memory, visual attention and concentration, as well as decreases in impulsivity among school children.[2] Breakfast participation among Colorado's lower-income students has dramatically increased over the past 5 years, from 38 percent in 2011 to 59 percent in 2015. Weakening support for integrating both programs into the school

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[1] Colorado Dept. of Education

[2] Leos-Urbel, J., Schwartz, A.E., Weinstein, M., & Corcoran, S. (2013). Not just for poor kids: the impact of universal free school breakfast on meal participation and school outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 36, 88-107

day could have serious impacts on the ability of our lower-income students to start the day focused and ready to learn.

A Case in Point- Denver County School District 1

Denver D1 successfully met the updated standards in the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 with a return to buying fresh ingredients and crafting many menu items from scratch. If their program was to be funded through a block-grant, the impact on this large, growing district of over 90,000 students would be:

- Loss of $0.06 funding per lunch meal- This would equate to a **reduction in revenue** of nearly $481,000 annually based on the more than 8 million lunch meals served last school year.
- **Loss of Jobs-** School Nutrition Operators spend the majority of their revenue on people and food. As the pool of available resources gets smaller, critical positions will need to be eliminated lending to higher rates of unemployment.
- With 68% of their 90,000 students qualifying for free or reduced meal benefits, any continued increases in student enrollment or students living in poverty will mean hundreds of **students may go without meals** as the pool of resources available to subsidize meals becomes increasingly smaller each year. Low-income students depend on these meals to start the day focused on their education instead of rumbling bellies.
- The **return of highly-processed foods** filled with artificial colors, sweeteners, additives and preservatives is inevitable as the food service operator will have to look to these "cheap foods" to balance the budget versus offering fresh, healthy choices.

The current structure of the child nutrition programs is based upon a shared, bipartisan commitment to provide children access to the nutritious meals they need to improve health and support learning. This commitment must be maintained. We respectfully ask you to urge your colleagues to reject H.R. 5003 and any proposal to block grant the child nutrition programs.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to Colorado kids. If you have any questions, please contact Cate Blackford, Director of Public Policy for Hunger Free Colorado at cate@hungerfreecolorado.org

Sincerely,

Children's Hospital Colorado

Colorado Children's Campaign

Colorado Fiscal Institute

Healthier Colorado

LiveWell Colorado

Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

Colorado School Nutrition Association

Hunger Free Colorado

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of Colorado