

**FRIENDS OF THE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM
FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)
c/o National WIC Association**

September XX, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee

Dear Chair Leahy, Ranking Member Shelby, Chair DeLauro, and Ranking Member Granger:

Throughout fiscal year 2022, Congress wisely invested in the long-term health of America's next generation by boosting fruit and vegetable benefits under the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The undersigned organizations – a diverse coalition of maternal and public health organizations, children's advocates, farm and agriculture partners, and retail and industry stakeholders – strongly support extending WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit for the entirety of fiscal year 2023. Although we remain optimistic that a bipartisan, full-year appropriations agreement can be reached, **we collectively urge that Congress take action before September 30 – including through a continuing resolution – to extend enhanced WIC fruit and vegetable benefits into fiscal year 2023.**

Since April 2021, more than 4.8 million women and children have received enhanced WIC fruit and vegetable benefits. In fiscal year 2022, Congress aligned the value of WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit with independent, science-based recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit now ensures that WIC participants can reach 50 percent of intake recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.¹ Children now receive \$24 per month, instead of only \$9 per month. Enhanced access to nutritious foods through a more robust WIC benefit has been a public health success: only a few months after implementation, the National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute measured a ¼ cup per day increase in fruit and vegetable intake for WIC-enrolled children.²

Enhancing WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit remains an essential support for families grappling with the economic effects of COVID-19, including rising food costs related to supply chain disruptions and inflation. In July 2022, fruit and vegetable prices were 9.3 percent higher than the previous year.³ Inaction resulting in a lapse in enhanced fruit and vegetable benefits and a return to baseline values would diminish the purchasing power of WIC families and erode the quantity of priority nutrients delivered through WIC's science-based food package. This dynamic would stand in stark contrast with the other elements of the WIC food package (e.g., dairy, grains, eggs) that are issued by quantity and therefore insulate both participating families and the food sector from inflationary pressures.

Congress has already come together three times to ensure that WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit is aligned with the recommendations of the National Academies – through both the September and December 2021 continuing resolutions and then the March 2022 omnibus agreement. Failure to act before the September 30 deadline would disrupt access to nutritious foods for 4.8 million women

and children, adversely impacting participant retention and thwarting hard-earned progress in boosting healthy eating patterns.

As the fiscal year draws to a close, we urge Congress to act swiftly to provide State and local providers with certainty, ensure continued access to nutritious foods for families across the country, and help build a healthier future for America's next generation.

Sincerely,

National WIC Association
[signatory organizations]

¹ See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report, at 271, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/2017-nasem-report.pdf>.

² Ritchie L, Lee D, Felix C, Sallack L, Chauvenet C, Machel G, Whaley SE. Multi-State WIC Participant Survey: Cash Value Benefit Increase During COVID. The National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. March 2022.

³ See U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Summary Findings: Food Price Outlook, 2022 and 2023. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings/> (last updated Aug. 25, 2022).