

National Collaborative for Infants & Toddlers and the National WIC Association

<DATE>

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Rosa De Lauro
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

Re: Participation Estimates, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Granger, and Ranking Member DeLauro,

Since 1974, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has strengthened food security, improved diet quality, and supported a strong start in life for America's youth. Recent data show WIC participation exceeding previous projections as more families are accessing WIC's vital nutrition services. In recognition of WIC's health benefits and increasing participation, the XXX undersigned national, state, and local organizations representing maternal and child health organizations, family support advocates, and research partners respectfully urge Congress **to include sufficient resources in a short-term Continuing Resolution to ensure that WIC can continue providing all eligible women, infants, and children who seek to participate with the full, science-based nutrition benefit. We also call on Congress to fully fund WIC for fiscal year 2024 to sustain current benefits and increasing participation.**

WIC Improves Participants' Health

WIC has a proven track record of reducing hunger, improving diet quality, and preventing disease. WIC participants are four times more likely to be food secure than eligible non-participants; enrollment during pregnancy is associated with a decreased risk of household food insecurity after birth.¹ When introduced in 2009, WIC's fruit and vegetable cash value benefit (CVB) increased fresh fruit consumption by 28.6 percent, frozen vegetable consumption by 27.8 percent, and fresh vegetable consumption by 17.5 percent.² The CVB bump passed by Congress in 2021 and extended on a bipartisan basis in subsequent appropriations legislation further increased fruit and vegetable consumption by an average of ¼ cup per day.³ WIC alleviates food insecurity and nutrition insecurity significantly, reducing the risk of

¹ Insolera, N., Cohen, A., & Wolfson, J. A. (2022). SNAP and WIC Participation During Childhood and Food Security in Adulthood, 1984-2019. *American Journal of Public Health, 112*(10), 1498–1506. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2022.306967>

² Andreyeva, T., & Luedicke, J. (2015). Incentivizing fruit and vegetable purchases among participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. *Public Health Nutrition, 18*(1), 33–41. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980014000512>

³ 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.

cardiovascular disease of all participants⁴ and supports brain development and immunization rates in young children⁵.

Additional Resources Needed to Ensure Continuation of Benefits

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) previously estimated that 6.5 million people would participate in WIC during fiscal year 2024. However, recently released data show that participation exceeded 6.7 million individuals in June 2023, with participation expected to continue to increase. Growing participation reflects WIC's reduction of administrative barriers through modernization efforts and flexibility, the efficacy of the fruit and vegetable benefit, as well as rising food costs⁶.

If WIC does not receive the necessary investment for FY24, hundreds of thousands of postpartum women and children will be turned away from the program. Moreover, a lack of additional resources could further lead states to take measures to bring spending in line with available funds, such as scaling back outreach efforts, reducing clinic staff, shortening clinic hours, or even turning away eligible applicants⁷.

WIC Must Be Fully Funded to Meet Participation

Beyond the provision of additional resources, we urge Congress, as it works to complete appropriations bills for the 2024 fiscal year, to maintain nearly thirty years of precedent by keeping WIC fully funded for all eligible women, infants, and children who seek benefits. Unfortunately, the proposed appropriations for WIC in the Agriculture, Rural Development, and Food and Drug Administration appropriations legislation would leave many WIC participants with limited or no benefits, leading to a waitlist for the first time in decades.

The proposed \$6.3 billion funding level for WIC in the Senate Agriculture appropriations bill (S. 2131), would require states to turn away an estimated 600,000 postpartum women and children⁸. Failure to provide WIC with the resources to serve projected caseloads jeopardizes the health and well-being of thousands of mothers and young children.

The House Agriculture appropriations bill (H.R. 4368) funds WIC at \$6 billion, with a \$500 million rescission⁹. This bill, if enacted, would not only result in eligible applicants getting turned away but also reduces benefits. Specifically, 600,000 participants would be turned away and the current allocation of

⁴ "Food Insecurity's Long-Term Health Consequences," [www.heart.org](https://www.heart.org/en/news/2021/09/22/food-insecuritys-long-term-health-consequences), January 3, 2022, <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2021/09/22/food-insecuritys-long-term-health-consequences>.

⁵ National WIC Association. "2023 State of WIC Report: Building the Bridge to a Healthier Future." WIC Research, Policy and Practice Hub, 2023. <https://thewichub.org/2023-state-of-wic-report/>.

⁶ Bergh and Neuberger, "Hundreds of Thousands of Young Children and Postpartum Adults Would Be Turned Away from WIC under House and Senate Funding Levels," 4–5.

⁷ Bergh and Neuberger, "Hundreds of Thousands of Young Children and Postpartum Adults Would Be Turned Away from WIC under House and Senate Funding Levels," 2.

⁸ Neuberger, Zoë, and Katie Bergh. "600,000 Young Children and New Parents Could Be Turned Away Unless Congress Adheres to a 25-Year Bipartisan Commitment to Fully Fund WIC." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities* (blog), September 11, 2023. <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/600000-young-children-and-new-parents-could-be-turned-away-unless-congress-adheres-to-a-25>.

⁹ National WIC Association. "House Advances Bill To Cut Food For WIC Families," n.d. <https://www.nwica.org/press-releases/house-advances-bill-to-cut-food-for-wic-families>.

the CVB would be cut by 56 to 70 percent, reducing fruit and vegetable availability and consumption for another 4.7 million participants¹⁰.

For nearly 30 years, there has been a bipartisan agreement in Congress to provide WIC with the resources necessary to serve every eligible woman, infant, and child. We strongly urge lawmakers to honor this commitment, providing an urgently needed investment in a Continuing Resolution and fully funding WIC in the FY24 Appropriations law, so that no woman or child is turned away from the program and no participant has their benefits cut. We urge both the House and Senate to continue their bipartisan support for full funding of WIC so that mothers and their young children can lead a food and nutrition secure healthy life.

Sincerely,

<LIST ORGANIZATIONS HERE>

[Click here to add your organization's signature to the letter.](#)

¹⁰ Neuberger and Bergh, "600,000 Young Children and New Parents Could Be Turned Away Unless Congress Adheres to a 25-Year Bipartisan Commitment to Fully Fund WIC."