

FY25 Appropriations Sign-on: FRIENDS OF THE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC) (c/o National WIC Association)

**** This letter is for *national organizations* ****

**** Deadline to sign on is **COB Thursday, April 4, 2024******

**** Please reach out to Nell Menefee-Libey, Senior Public Policy Manager at the National WIC Association, with any questions: nmenefeelibey@nwica.org ****

Re: FY 2025 Agriculture Appropriations, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

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

For fifty years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has established a track record of public health success, building healthier futures for our nation's families. In fiscal year 2024, WIC experienced unprecedented pressures on program funding, as participation and food costs both outpaced initial projections. Despite a challenging federal funding environment, Congress came together on a bipartisan basis to maintain the commitment to full funding for WIC, providing the resources to ensure that every eligible family who seeks WIC services can receive them. We, the undersigned organizations – a diverse coalition of maternal and public health organizations, children's advocates, agriculture partners, and retail and industry stakeholders – urge Congress to build on this success with continued, bipartisan

investment in WIC. **We specifically urge \$7.75 billion in WIC budget authority for fiscal year 2025 and clear commitment to the scientific integrity of WIC's food packages.**

Investing in proven, early interventions to strengthen nutrition security has been demonstrated to grow a healthier population and reduce healthcare expenditures in the long-term. In 2018, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimated that Medicaid and Medicare spent more than \$207 billion to treat chronic diet-related conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease -- approximately 15.3% of *all* Medicaid and Medicare spending. WIC's role in assuring healthier birth outcomes more than doubles its return on investment: for every dollar spent on WIC, about \$2.48 is returned in healthcare cost savings. WIC's cost savings are likely even more pronounced, as healthier WIC foods over the past decade contributed to a 9% decline in childhood obesity among WIC-enrolled toddlers.

Consistent with decades of precedent, Congress should ensure adequate funding to support WIC's growing caseload and prevent shortfalls that necessitate waiting lists or other measures that could adversely impact the program's reach and public health impacts. Program costs are also increasing due to higher participation rates, which reflects improvements in service delivery that expands the program's reach and public health success. In fiscal year 2023, USDA estimated that 6.576 million participants received WIC services. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that as many as 7 million participants will be certified for WIC services in fiscal year 2025, in keeping with recent trends of growing program participation in 2022 and 2023. While recently released caseload data shows a short-term plateau in program growth, steadfast commitment from Congress to ensure that no one is turned away from WIC will allow for renewed outreach and investment, enabling the program to reach more eligible families.

In addition to promising efforts to modernize service delivery and expand program coverage, forthcoming evidence-based updates to WIC's food packages mark an exciting step forward for the program. Beginning in 2021, Congress directed an expansion of WIC's fruit and vegetable benefit to deliver approximately 50% of recommended daily intake as outlined in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Initial evidence reported by the National WIC Association and Nutrition Policy Institute identify that WIC's fruit and vegetable bump has already improved fruit and vegetable consumption among WIC-enrolled toddlers, including through purchase of a greater variety of produce. USDA wisely incorporated this science-based recommendation into its proposed updates to the broader WIC food packages. Under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, USDA is directed by statute to

commission an independent scientific review and adjust issuance to reflect nutrition science, public health concerns, and cultural eating patterns. With limited resources that constitute less than 10% of an average grocery budget, the WIC food packages are carefully crafted to deliver priority nutrients and introduce program participants to a broad range of nutrient-dense foods. **We are opposed to legislative efforts – including riders in the appropriations process – that would undermine the independent, science-based updates to the WIC food packages.** We eagerly anticipate implementation of forthcoming changes to WIC’s food packages, honoring the evidence-based recommendations of the National Academies of Sciences.

As outlined in the President’s Budget, Congress should maintain the longstanding set-aside for breastfeeding peer counselors (\$90 million) and invest in program infrastructure (\$16 million) to contribute to WIC’s ongoing efforts to modernize service delivery. Additionally, Congress should revitalize the Management Information System (MIS) set-aside authorized under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Updates to WIC’s complex computer systems will be essential as the program continues to transition to modern service delivery models, with updates needed to implement the revised food packages, further integrate with healthcare databases, and

scale up new transaction technologies like online and mobile payments. The National WIC Association recommends that Congress institute a \$50 million set-aside for Management Information Systems in fiscal year 2025. Additionally, Congress should consider additional measures to safeguard WIC’s ability to serve all eligible families in the face of unanticipated cost pressures, as experienced in fiscal year 2024.

WIC’s long record of public health success is well positioned to have broader impacts as the program reaches more eligible families and modernizes operations to reflect commercial practice in healthcare and retail settings. As Congress begins the process of considering fiscal year 2025 appropriations, we urge Congress to build on recent bipartisan success and renew its ongoing commitment to WIC’s role in strengthening nutrition security and improving health outcomes that lay the foundation for healthier futures for moms and young children.

Sincerely,

National WIC Association
[UNDERSIGNED ORGANIZATIONS]

cc: The Honorable Andy Harris
The Honorable Sanford Bishop
The Honorable Martin Heinrich
The Honorable John Hoeven