



Congresswoman
Rosa L. DeLauro

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Kaelan Richards
(202) 225-3661

March 4, 2010

DELAURO ON THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE CHILD NUTRITION ACT

Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing

(As Prepared for Delivery)

The hearing is called to order. I want to welcome Ranking Member Kingston, our fellow Members of the Committee, and our distinguished guests today to this, our second hearing of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee this year.

Let me begin by welcoming our witnesses today. Kevin Concannon, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services. Dr. Kelly Brownell of Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. Dr. Mariana Chilton of the Drexel University School of Public Health. Scott Faber of the Grocery Manufacturers Association. And Zoe Neuberger of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Thank you all for being here today to share your insights and your expertise.

As the Members of the Committee all know, last week we kicked off our 2010 hearings with Secretary Vilsack and his staff, who outlined goals and priorities for the FY 2011 budget.

Among them, as you will remember, was an issue that is dear to the hearts of many on this panel, as well as to the First Lady – improving child nutrition. With WIC, CSFP, SNAP, the School Lunch Program, and other crucial food assistance and nutrition programs under this subcommittee's purview, it behooves us to take a closer look at ways we can work to improve the health and nutrition of our children. In addition, we want to help frame the issue by listening to the experts. Their input is especially critical this year as Congress works on the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. We must act before the current extension runs out later this year.

When it comes to child nutrition, we are confronted with what at first appears to be a two-headed problem. On one hand, we face a problem of access – Far too many children in America are simply not getting enough to eat.

On the other hand, as a result of poor nutrition and unhealthy food options in our schools and on our dinner plates, we face a growing epidemic of child obesity that is harming the health and the quality of life of our kids. So we need to do more to ensure that the foods our children eat have the nutritional value they need to thrive.

In fact, these problems are two sides of the same coin. Research has shown time and time again that families that are struggling economically have a harder time affording healthy food options. Simply put, unhealthy food

is cheaper and easier to get, a problem that we in government, and we on this committee who oversee nutrition funding, must do more to rectify.

In fact, this discussion begins with the current economy. And right now, as we all know, many families are struggling. In America today, almost 14 million children – that's every 1 in 5 -- live below the federal poverty level, and that number is expected to rise to as high as 27% as a result of this recession. If you factor in that the poverty line is actually much lower than what families need to really get by, it is estimated that 41% of kids live in a low-income household right now.

This dismaying poverty rate very quickly translates into hunger and malnutrition for our children. According to the Food Research Action Center, 18% of Americans across the country have experienced food hardship in the past year, meaning that they did not have the money to purchase the food their families desperately needed. In fact, more than two out of every three children who participate in the school lunch program in our public school system – 69%! – currently qualify for free or reduced school lunches.

Government has a role in helping to alleviate hunger, which we try to accomplish in many ways. For example, one in five children receives food stamp assistance. But one of the problems we face, and need to find better ways to redress, is to make sure kids across the country are actually getting the help they qualify for.

Right now, according to the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire, almost one in three children in rural households (29%) participate in one of our child nutrition programs. That being said, too many of these qualifying households do not participate in any of these programs, including 55% of those eligible for the National School Lunch Program and a whopping 92% of those eligible for the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

So it is time that we take a hard look at our child nutrition efforts so that the aid is getting to the people that need it. And, as we move forward, we should ensure that the resources we apply to child nutrition are translating directly to these kids. To take just one example, if we increase reimbursement rates for school food programs, we need to make sure we are also reducing waste and overhead in these programs, and that this money is actually being used for what it was intended – food for children.

In addition, of course, we must do more to improve the nutritional quality of food in our schools. And we should work to encourage – in the small but notable ways that government can – families and consumers towards healthier food options.

I read in Mr. Concannon's testimony that the Administration "has two main priorities for Child Nutrition programs...(1) reducing barriers and improving access to combat childhood hunger; and (2) enhancing nutritional quality and the health of the school environment." We on this committee share these two priorities – These are the two sides of the child nutrition problem which I just outlined. I look forward to hearing today's testimony today about how we can better address both of them, and help to ensure all of our kids a happier, healthier future.

Thank you. Mr. Kingston, would you like to say a few words?

###