

December 13, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.
Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Ambassador Susan Rice
Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden and Ambassador Susan Rice:

As organizations dedicated to improving the health, development, education, and well being of children, we thank you for your leadership in convening the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health this past September, and for releasing a comprehensive and robust [National Strategy](#) to end hunger and reduce diet-related diseases by 2030. We urge you to use every tool and resource at your Administration's disposal to prioritize food and nutrition security for Americans, without further delay. There are a host of actions federal agencies can currently take to streamline enrollment in federal nutrition programs, provide technical support to states to leverage Medicaid to address hunger, and broadly, to bring heightened attention to the importance of good nutrition to the health and development of children and students.

We wholeheartedly support the Biden administration's whole of government approach to addressing child and student hunger and diet related diseases. Specifically, we were pleased to see the recent partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) at their "Come to the Table" event, which brought together health care and nutrition advocates, representatives, individuals with lived experience, and others to advance the Conference's goals of ensuring all Americans have the resources to access affordable *and* healthy food. Our organizations are committed to working side by side with you to ensure the ideas outlined in the National Strategy are successful, as we firmly believe that good nutrition is the cornerstone of the health and development of all children and students in this country.

Most fundamentally, we believe your Administration should focus on coordinating the multiple federal agencies working on nutrition policy - specifically USDA, Housing and Human Development (HUD), HHS, and Department of Education (ED) - and ensure that all agencies are working together in identifying precisely how to integrate their programs. It is imperative that all Americans are getting the full benefit of the investment.

As you have stated, modernizing and streamlining enrollment in federal nutrition programs is critical, and we believe there are multiple steps you can take to reduce barriers to enrollment and administrative "red tape." While we fully respect how complicated this process can be, investing in a system that ensures families can seamlessly enroll in nutrition programs as their eligibility is being determined for other federal programs is critical. For instance, as families go through the process of eligibility for subsidies or Medicaid/CHIP, there should be an automatic referral to SNAP. While some states have integrated benefit systems, [not all do](#). Therefore, we urge you to not only encourage all states to

streamline and modernize their eligibility systems, but also take the necessary administrative actions to make it a priority and seamless for states to do so.

We believe it is imperative that our federal health programs fully recognize and integrate nutrition and nutrition services as a core component of our health systems. We are encouraged by the steps Oregon, Massachusetts, and Arkansas have taken in applying for Medicaid 1115 waivers that allow these states to leverage their Medicaid funding to address hunger. We encourage your Administration to take steps to encourage other states to follow suit with appropriate guidance documents and support.

We also believe that it is imperative that the Administration work with states to streamline the process for applying for Pandemic EBT for the current school year and Summer Pandemic EBT in 2023. We want to ensure that the additional requirements for the current school year do not create barriers to states administering benefits this summer. Providing clear feedback for states to get their school aged plans approved for this school year will ensure that more kids have access to these critical benefits. We know that children and their families rely on these benefits, and that Summer Pandemic EBT can play a critical role in mitigating hunger during the months when schools are closed.

As you note in the National Strategy, schools play a critical role in meeting the ambitious goals outlined at the Conference. USDA and ED should jointly issue a Dear Colleague to highlight best practices for designing school days to support student academic, physical, and mental health and well-being. For example, the document can provide information and resources on the benefits of recess, how to maximize movement in schools with limited outdoor space, and best practices for scheduling recess before lunch and providing children with enough time to eat in schools with limited cafeteria space.

Schools can support the physical health and fitness of students through physical education, recess, after school athletics, or other avenues. Physical activity improves a student's health by reducing not only stress and anxiety, but also reducing the likelihood of developing health conditions such as diabetes and obesity. Furthermore, physical activity also improves student learning by increasing alertness, attention, motivation, and the retention of information. We were pleased to see within the National Strategy that ED will not only provide guidance to states and districts on how they can use funding through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act to support physical activity for children, but that they will also provide strategies through the Engage Every Student Initiative to increase participation in physical fitness programs and incorporate physical activity in summer learning and after-school programs. These steps could have a powerful impact on improving student health and well-being, and we encourage the Department to move forward quickly.

To ensure that the action items outlined in the National Strategy are realized, we believe your Administration should have a thoughtful, coordinated strategy to benchmark progress annually and update the strategy accordingly. A clear and specific timeline on action steps that the Administration is working towards would not only give stakeholders insight into the progress achieved to date but also ensure that the communities our organizations work with and represent are fully educated and prepared to take full advantage of these opportunities.

America's families are experiencing a significant nutrition crisis, navigating the challenge of affording food and the equally complex challenge of accessing nutritious food. The short and long term consequences of failing to provide a nutrition safety net that meets the health and developmental needs of children and students can no longer be ignored. We stand ready to work with you to meet this moment.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Bruce Lesley in blue ink.

Bruce Lesley
President, First Focus on Children

Handwritten signature of Denise Forte in black ink.

Denise Forte
CEO, The Education Trust