



The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

Lawmakers poised to cut food benefits for toddlers

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Congress hits its next funding deadline in two weeks (Jan. 19), a cutoff that some advocates are calling a last chance for many measures that help kids.

First on the chopping block: Programs that feed hungry children and mothers.

[This week on Speaking of Kids, the National WIC Association's Nell Menefee-Libey tells First Focus on Children](#) that the fate of 7 million women, infants and children could be upended by Congress.

"Fully funding the [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children] is really the ask that we are bringing to lawmakers," the National WIC Association's public policy manager said. "The January 19 funding deadline, when the Agriculture Appropriations continuing resolution expires, is our real last date to get this done."

"Full funding," by definition, would allow WIC to serve every eligible person who walks through the door. WIC traditionally has enjoyed strong bipartisan support and throughout the last 30 years Congress has essentially treated it as a mandatory program, Menefee-Libey said, providing full funding in each appropriation. **This year, however, lawmakers have proposed flat-funding WIC at FY 2023 levels, which would boot roughly 2 million participants. To make things more egregious, lawmakers also have proposed slashing the program's highly successful fruit and vegetable benefit by as much as 70%.**

"We've seen huge increases in child poverty and child food insecurity in the past couple of years," Menefee-Libey said. "It's important to think about these proposed cuts to the WIC program as part of a really disturbing broader trend of Congress turning their backs on families."

[WIC provides targeted food benefits and nutrition services for pregnant and postpartum women and children from birth through age 5.](#) Nutrition science guides the food package, which is designed to provide very specific nutrients to support healthy pregnancy, healthy postpartum recovery, and optimal child development. WIC clinics also play a critical role in connecting families to public services and even offer crucial and often

overlooked benefits, such as childhood literacy programs and car seat loan programs. Over the last five decades, WIC has measurably improved public health through longer pregnancies, better birth outcomes, higher cognitive development scores, lower rates of obesity, improved overall diet quality, and, notably, increased intake of fruits and vegetables among enrolled toddlers.

Advocates also voice concern about what will happen to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly called “food stamps”, which provides healthy, whole foods to [more than 14 million children through the Farm Bill](#). **First Focus on Children Director of Health, Environmental, and Nutrition Policy Abbie Malloy tells [Speaking of Kids](#) that Congress is working hard to limit eligibility for SNAP benefits**, a process that will play out in the spring during (highly anticipated) fighting over Farm Bill reauthorization.

[First Focus on Children recently co-founded the Child and Student Nutrition Alliance](#), comprised of children’s health groups working to raise awareness around the need for federal investment in the highest quality nutritional standards. In addition to fighting the forces that would diminish SNAP, First Focus on Children and the CSNA also will use the Farm Bill as an opportunity to improve SNAP, for instance, by championing legislation that would allow families to use the benefits for nutritious convenience foods, such as hot rotisserie chickens and salad bars.

“The Farm Bill gives us an opportunity to change a lot of those things,” First Focus on Children’s Malloy said. “There’ll be lots of opportunities for advocacy, on the ground and in Washington. So we hope folks will join us for that, just pushing for these really positive bills that can make SNAP all that it can be.”



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