



June 10, 2014

Dear Member of Congress:

RE: FY 2015 Agriculture Appropriations and School Nutrition Programs

On behalf of the Public Health Institute, I am writing to urge you to reject provisions in the the Fiscal Year 2015 Agriculture Appropriations bill that would undermine the science-based nutrition standards for the school nutrition programs, and to support any efforts that would protect these standards.

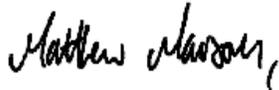
Public Health Institute has a long history of working with schools and partners to implement programs and strategies to help improve children's nutrition. Our efforts range from providing effective school-based nutrition education to helping make important adjustments to school environments that encourage children to make healthy food and activity choices during the school day. In our work, we see first-hand that hungry and poorly nourished children are at greater risk of health and learning challenges. With children consuming at least half of their daily food intake at school, the school meal programs play an essential role in protecting children from hunger, promoting good nutrition, and helping them to develop healthy eating behaviors that can last a lifetime.

Recognizing the role of schools in promoting children's health, the bipartisan Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 set forth important science-based and common-sense improvements to the school meal program nutrition standards. For the first time in nearly 20 years, the school meal nutrition standards reflect the most recent recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Now, school meals ensure children can choose balanced meals at school that include whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, and low-fat dairy products, which are all foods recommended as part of a healthy diet for children.

We recognize that the new changes to the school meal programs can present a variety of challenges to schools, but currently more than 90 percent of schools are meeting the new nutrition standards for lunch. Further, and most importantly, the improvements to the nutrition quality of school meals are driving positive improvements in children's diets. After two years of having the new science-based standards in place, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has found that school-aged children are eating 16 percent more vegetables and 23 percent more fruit at lunch. Moreover, healthier school meals are starting to attract new students to the program as well. For example, Los Angeles Unified – one of the nation's largest school districts, has seen a 14 percent increase in participation since implementation of the new standards.

School meal programs are demonstrating real success in promoting children's health. There is too much at stake to go back now. Public Health Institute urges you to protect the science-based nutrition standards for school meals, and to reject proposals that weaken or impede the nutritional gains being made in the school nutrition programs. Thank you for your support for children's health and nutrition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Marsom". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Matthew Marsom
Vice President for Public Policy & Programs