



June 19, 2014

The First Lady  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20006

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mrs. Obama and Secretary Vilsack:

On behalf of the School Nutrition Association's (SNA) 55,000 members – school nutrition professionals serving healthy meals in cafeterias nationwide – we are writing to request a meeting with you to discuss the challenges our members face as they continue to work diligently, and in good faith, to implement the regulatory requirements of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA).

SNA and its members have been proud to partner with you both in our collective efforts to improve the nutrition and quality of school meals. We take pride in the tremendous progress that school nutrition professionals have made in offering more nutritious choices and encouraging students to enjoy new fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other healthy foods available with school meals.

Indeed, school meal programs enjoy a long history of success in teaching children to make nutritious choices. On their own, SNA members have launched student taste tests, chef partnerships, Harvest of the Month programs, Farm to School initiatives, community health fairs, social media campaigns and other creative approaches to promote healthier meals to students. In addition, SNA has taken the lead, working with you and several other partners, in developing tools, sharing best practices and providing numerous educational resources to aid our members in their efforts.

But to continue to reach and engage children, school nutrition professionals must have the resources and flexibility to plan and serve healthy menus that appeal to students.

Unfortunately, in spite of the best intentions and efforts, too many individual school district operations continue to struggle with the increased costs, decreased revenues, increased waste and declining participation directly associated with implementation of the nutrition standards. And while it is true that 90 percent of school meal programs have met the 2012 requirements, it is simply inaccurate to say that implementation has been successful, or that schools are prepared to meet the standards that take effect on July 1.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) *own data* sheds light on the consequences of the serious operational challenges that school meal programs have encountered under the new regulations. After 30 years of steady growth, student participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) has fallen precipitously in 49 states. Under the new nutrition standards, more than *one million* fewer students choose school lunch each day! This discouraging statistic is made even worse in light of the fact that student enrollment in NSLP schools has increased by 1.2 million students just in the last year.

These losses reduce revenue for school meal programs already struggling with higher costs. As leaders of SNA, we have heard from program operators all across the country who no longer have adequate net revenue to reinvest in their programs and purchase needed equipment, or who must rely on their school districts to cover year-end

losses, often by taking money from educational programs. SNA's members face an untenable financial challenge, while still continuing to do all they can to preserve the long-term sustainability of school meal programs.

Mrs. Obama and Secretary Vilsack, we want there to be no doubt: SNA and its members support the majority of the new nutrition standards for school meals. But to meet the goals that we share with you for America's children, we are seeking some common-sense flexibility in the rules in order to help students adjust to healthy changes in their school cafeterias, to increase the number of children who benefit from healthy school meals, and to keep our programs financially stable.

While SNA and its members appreciate efforts USDA has made to date to provide relief, such as the flexibility of the original grains/proteins maximum, we are concerned that the pace of these changes is insufficient to address the continual slide in participation. Given this increasingly dire situation, SNA supports the House Fiscal Year 2015 Agriculture Appropriation Bill, which gives school meal programs, operating at a net loss for six months or more, the chance to apply for a *temporary*, one-year waiver as they work to meet the meal pattern requirements. We have also requested that USDA or Congress act to:

- Retain the current requirement that 50% of grains offered with school meals be whole grain rich, rather than further increasing the requirement to 100%.
- Retain Target 1 sodium levels, and suspend implementation of further sodium levels unless and until scientific research supports such reductions for children.
- Retain requirements to offer a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, but eliminate the mandate that students must take a fruit or vegetable with meals.
- Allow any food item permitted to be served as part of a reimbursable meal to be sold at any time as a competitive food.

We are certain that you will agree that these four points are very reasonable, rational requests, ones that would neither gut the nutrition standards, nor give license to schools to serve "junk food." Instead, they would strengthen school meal programs by providing school nutrition professionals the flexibility to plan menus that would increase student consumption of healthy choices while limiting waste.

In two short weeks, the July 1, 2014, implementation deadline for new rules affecting the School Breakfast Program, as well as all foods sold in competition with federal school meals will be upon us. Our desire for a face-to-face conversation is urgent. We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and discuss these issues together.

Sincerely,



Leah Schmidt, SNS  
SNA President  
Hickman Mills C-1 School District, MO



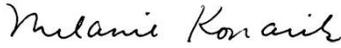
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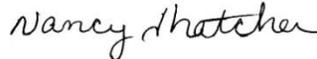
  
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