

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick  
271 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

February 23, 2021

Dear Representative Fitzpatrick,

As service providers, advocates, and health professionals who work with families with young children, we are writing to urge your support of the American Rescue Plan. Pennsylvania families with children are hurting and the pandemic has only perpetuated already difficult times. Recent U.S. Census PULSE data revealed 12 million children were not getting enough to eat in December 2020, which is ten times more than the data showed us just one year earlier.<sup>1</sup>

Not only are hundreds of thousands of parents facing unemployment or significant loss of income, but they are faced with other barriers such as school and child care closures, and heightened challenges to accessing services, many of which have been altered due to COVID restrictions. The significant investments proposed to help children included in this bill, from funding to support child care and evidenced-based home visiting, to the expansion of the child tax credit, are all crucial to ensure our youngest Americans are not left behind. But we also want to draw your attention to the importance of additional funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC), so it is not lost in negotiations.

Research shows that participating in WIC can improve outcomes, reduce infant mortality, improve cognitive development, increase breastfeeding rates, and improve children's nutrient intake.<sup>2</sup> Even before the pandemic, WIC reached only about half of the low-income women and young children who qualify. Now, with WIC offices closed and processes to ensure the safety of clients and staff in place, enrollment and retention of WIC eligible families has become even more difficult, leaving too many families and children without access to healthy nutrition.

The proposed legislation includes up to \$880 million to help more eligible families access WIC's proven health and developmental benefits and temporarily boost WIC's nutritional value. This includes \$390 million in grants for modernization and innovative services. The modernization and innovation grants will make it easier for eligible families to enroll and continue participating over time. For instance, WIC has not adopted modernizations that are routine in other

---

<sup>1</sup> By Joseph Llobrera, and Joseph Llobrera Director of Research and Interim Program Area Lead. "COVID Relief Bills Respond to Extraordinarily High Food Hardship." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 9 Feb. 2021, [www.cbpp.org/blog/covid-relief-bills-respond-to-extraordinarily-high-food-hardship](http://www.cbpp.org/blog/covid-relief-bills-respond-to-extraordinarily-high-food-hardship).

<sup>2</sup> By Dottie Rosenbaum, et al. "Food Assistance in COVID Relief Bills Would Reduce Hardship, Provide Economic Stimulus." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 10 Feb. 2021, [www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/food-assistance-in-covid-relief-bills-would-reduce-hardship-provide?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=24947011-4619-477d-9e6c-eb84824c91f3](http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/food-assistance-in-covid-relief-bills-would-reduce-hardship-provide?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=24947011-4619-477d-9e6c-eb84824c91f3).

programs, like online applications or video appointments. While the pandemic has caused states to hastily adopt some of these measures, such as accepting electronic documents and offering telephone appointments, they will need continued support to fully integrate these practices and ensure the comprehensive and secure technology needed to continue them in the future.

The proposed legislation also includes \$490 million to provide states the option of raising the WIC fruit and vegetable benefits to \$35 monthly per person which provides needed funds for families to access healthy nutritional options. The National Academies of Sciences has recommended substantially increasing the fruit and vegetable benefit so participants could come closer to eating recommended amounts.<sup>3</sup> The bill makes funding available for a four-month increase in the benefit, currently at \$9 monthly for children and \$11 monthly for mothers, up to \$35 monthly.

We urge you to support the American Rescue Plan to provide critical assistance to families and children across the country who need access to food and other basic needs.

Sincerely,

---

<sup>3</sup> By Dottie Rosenbaum, et al. "Food Assistance in COVID Relief Bills Would Reduce Hardship, Provide Economic Stimulus." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 10 Feb. 2021, [www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/food-assistance-in-covid-relief-bills-would-reduce-hardship-provide?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=24947011-4619-477d-9e6c-eb84824c91f3](https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/food-assistance-in-covid-relief-bills-would-reduce-hardship-provide?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=24947011-4619-477d-9e6c-eb84824c91f3).