



Statement for the Record

On behalf of the

**NATIONAL PARENT TEACHER
ASSOCIATION (PTA)**

Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
June 12, 2014

**A National Priority: The Importance of Child
Nutrition Programs to our Nation's Health, Economy
and National Security**

By

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Chairman Stabenow, Ranking Member Cochran, committee members, and my fellow distinguished panelists, I am honored to have the opportunity to speak before you today on behalf of the over four million members of the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). With more than 24,000 local units, PTA flourishes in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Department of Defense schools in Europe.

I currently serve as the President of the National PTA, an elected volunteer position I assumed in June 2013. In addition to my involvement with National PTA, I have been active in state and local PTAs in Georgia, Maryland, Texas, Michigan and Kaiserslautern, Germany. I am currently employed as a senior operations analyst with General Dynamics at Fort Stewart, Georgia and am a retired United States Army Lieutenant Colonel. Most importantly, I have over two decades of experience as a father to my two wonderful children with my wife Caryn - Candice and Tre.

PTA was founded in 1897 and is the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States. PTA's legacy of influencing policy to protect the education, health, and overall well-being of children has made an indelible impact in the lives of millions of children and their families. This legacy includes the creation of kindergarten classes, a juvenile justice system, child labor laws, and mandatory immunizations for school children. Our mission is to be a powerful voice for every child.

With regard to today's hearing, one of the fundamental purposes of PTA is to preserve children's health and protect them from harm. PTA has been at the table from the beginning – piloting a hot lunch program in schools in the 1920's that led to PTA's advocacy for a national school lunch program and each subsequent reauthorization of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act.

Most recently, PTA and our coalition partners fought for passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which, as you know, made significant updates to our nation's school nutrition programs. PTA viewed this as both a win for kids and parents because parents knew that – for the first time – no matter what our kids purchased in the cafeteria, it was going to be good for them. And as the primary decision-makers in our kids' lives, it also provided us – parents – a stronger role through Local Wellness Policy development, implementation and evaluation. And as I always say, "if you're not at the table, you're on the menu."

I mention these past accomplishments not only to underscore PTA's commitment to the well-being of our nation's children, but also to provide a historical context for where we are today. We have made a commitment to our children for over 70 years to do right by them in the cafeteria, and we cannot turn our backs now. I know some of my fellow panelists will address the reality our nation's obesity crisis as it relates to our overall health and national security, so as a PTA leader and father, I am here today to tell you that parents and families are committed to working together to ensure the continued success of our nation's child nutrition programs.

So where are we today? Schools are making exceptional progress in the nutritional quality of the meals they are serving to our kids. There have been challenges along the way, but that's to be expected. We're parents after all! When is the last time you changed up the rules for your kids in the interest of their well-being and your kids were happy about it? Anyone?

As partners in the school building, PTA and parents understand that there are certain challenging realities – there’s never enough time, seldom enough money and often times minimal resources. But that has never and can never be a free pass to not do what is best for our kids. For parents, it means that we need to step up to the plate and support our schools – the board, the administration, the school food service, the teachers and the students - to make sure that school meals are successful.

And that means having a seat at the table and finding solutions to the challenges. Do we need updated kitchen equipment to serve fresh foods? Well – how are we going to secure funding? Do we need volunteers so breakfast can be served in the classroom? Well – let’s get some parents or grandparents together. Do we need to taste test some new items? How can we help? Do we need to adjust our fundraising practices? Let’s do this. Our kids don’t have enough time to eat lunch? How can we solve this problem? We can do this – together. It may take a little bit of time and a lot of effort, but we can do this.

In closing, I respectfully ask all committee members to keep in mind that we make decisions in every other part of the school based on what is best for our students’ success – and the cafeteria should be no different. I commend the committee for looking into these programs and understanding their critical importance for doing the right thing for *all* of our students.

After all, the nutritional needs of our children remain the same whether they live in Iowa or Georgia. It is impractical to force parents to fight for access to healthier school foods one school at a time, reinventing the wheel while facing the same obstacles at each and every turn. High quality national nutrition programs ease this burden, while still allowing for a great deal of local control over the implementation of the programs.

Once again, I would like to thank the committee and all of the other panelists for engaging in this topic, which is critical to the future of not only our children, but our country. Make no mistake, the decisions made during this reauthorization will impact our schools, our hospitals, our economy, our military, our homes and, most importantly, our kids. Thank you, and I would be happy to respond to any questions that you may have.