

Thank you for giving us at the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) the opportunity to testify here today on the reauthorization of the child nutrition programs, with a special focus on the community-based programs. Our testimony will concern the nutrition programs for infants and preschoolers, and for school-aged children in the out of school hours.

These programs are:

The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children -the program almost universally known as (and admired as) "WIC."

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which provides federal funds for nutrition for preschoolers in family child care homes, child care centers, and Head Start programs. CACFP also provides federal support for meals for children in domestic violence and homeless shelters.

The afterschool food programs -CACFP provides support for snacks and suppers in afterschool programs; and the National School Lunch Program supports afterschool snacks in school-sponsored afterschool programs.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which pays for meals and snacks for low-income children in summer programs operated by schools, other public agencies like parks and recreation departments, community-based non-profits, and other sponsors.

This Committee has had a long and effective bipartisan approach to the nation's nutrition investments. You, Mr. Chairman, and Senators Harkin, Lugar and Leahy have helped lead the way to protecting and strengthening the child nutrition and food stamp programs.

Similarly, the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, with leadership from you and Senator Kohl, has put together a series of positive child nutrition initiatives since the last full child nutrition reauthorization in 1998. Part of our testimony today will be about the need to build on those initiatives and pilots in summer food, school breakfast, and afterschool supper programs, among others.

We at the Food Research and Action Center look forward to working with this Committee, the entire Congress and the Administration to produce the best possible bill.

We also want to acknowledge the leadership and initiatives that Undersecretary Bost and his team at USDA have provided over the last two years - working hard to expand programs, simplify administration, and implement changes enacted by Congress in 1998 and since to boost summer, breakfast and afterschool participation, to reduce paperwork and to assure that more children in need get the benefits of these wonderful programs.

The child nutrition programs are just about the most effective federal investments that exist. As you proceed in reauthorization, we urge the Committee to remember at every point the enormous positive impact the programs have had in recent decades, are having now, and can have in the future on the physical, emotional, developmental, educational and economic wellbeing of low-income children, their families and their communities. A well-conceived reauthorization bill can build from these strengths. A well-conceived reauthorization bill can help the nation reach many important national goals -not just reducing childhood hunger and food insecurity, but improving prenatal care and child nutrition and health, enhancing early development, raising the quality of child care, strengthening rural communities and boosting rural development, increasing jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, improving the achievement of children in school, providing safe havens for children in out-of-school hours, supporting welfare-to-work efforts, and providing critical help to the working poor.

This reauthorization is also a chance to build on the programs' strengths in order to tackle new health, demographic and workforce realities. As one example, many more low-income parents are working longer hours or nontraditional shifts. The need for before-school care, afterschool care that runs into the evening, and summer activities has become far greater, and therefore the need to adjust the nutrition programs to feed children in these hours has become urgent as well.

Similarly, the growing incidence of childhood obesity requires the reauthorization process to address how the programs can be strengthened in order to reduce obesity. As this Committee knows, there has been a tremendous increase in childhood obesity in recent years. This is terribly worrisome. Helping schools and out-of-school programs purchase more fruits and vegetables is one solution to the problem. But improving children's access to the nutrition programs is another. A range of studies show that children in the federally-funded programs eat more healthily than children who do not -who bring food from home in brown bags, or eat at home, or don't eat at all.

A handful of people have alleged that the nutrition programs provide too much food to children and contribute in that way to obesity. All the evidence is to the contrary. The studies show that children eating school breakfasts eat more healthily than other children. Children eating food under the CACFP program in preschools and child care centers eat more healthily than other children. The programs have healthy portion sizes -this is not where "supersizing" occurs.

Certainly the food choices that some schools or community programs make could be improved. Congress could help by increasing program resources, as well as by limiting the availability in schools of less healthy food, from other sources, that competes with the better food in the federal programs. But obesity is not a result of poor families or schools or community programs having too many resources for too much food. To say otherwise is just willfully ignoring the facts: the WIC food package for a child is worth \$40 per month; the federal support for an afterschool snack is 58 cents per child per day; the food in a school breakfast costs \$1.17 or less; in a school lunch, \$2.14 or less. (And the average food stamp allotment is 79 cents per meal per person.)

Indeed, emerging evidence shows that, among low-income people, hunger and food insecurity and obesity are tied together. Obesity can be, for the poor, an adaptive response to hunger, when poor people are unable to consistently get enough to eat throughout the month, so they eat more than they normally would during the periods that food is available. Low-income families and programs for children not only have limited resources but also often face limited food choices and higher prices in their neighborhoods. Resource constraints, not too much resources, are contributing to obesity.

The child nutrition programs contribute to reducing obesity in another way. By helping to fund, expand and improve recreation and other programs after school and in the summer, the programs keep children active and engaged, rather than sitting at home eating in front of a television. For example, nineteen out of twenty summer food programs are connected to some recreational or other activity. One study in California traced some obesity among low-income teens to the lack of organized afterschool programs and the teens' fear of being out in their unsafe community in unsupervised ways -these young girls just stayed at home to be safe. They need afterschool programs with good nutrition in them.

Before getting to specific recommendations, there are two other broad points I would like to make that apply to all of the community-based nutrition programs. First, many of the afterschool, summer and child care programs I will be discussing are operated by non-profits - frequently by faith-based groups. For example, some of the food banks that are part of America's Second Harvest are key providers of nutrition in afterschool programs. In some cases it is considerably harder to operate these programs if you are a non-profit than if you are a public

agency. Some of our recommendations are to make it easier for community-based non-profits to participate.

Second, while I am here to testify about the community-based programs, the rules governing school breakfast and lunch are important factors in the health of the community programs. (A fuller list of our recommendations for all programs, including school-based programs, is in the appendix to our written testimony.)

For example, we continually hear from local officials how desperately children need school breakfast and lunch programs. Mayor Menino of Boston talks about how his city's schools try hard not to close on snow days if only because the low-income children so desperately need the food and that the schools try to feed the children more on Friday before they go home to empty cupboards, and on Monday when they come in to school particularly ravenous. In Oregon this spring, as the fiscal crisis forces schools to operate only four days per week or add extra weeks of vacation, administrators and parents are deeply concerned not only about the educational damage but also the harm to hungry children when school meals programs aren't operating and the summer and other programs have to pick up the slack. These concerns underline how critically important the community-based programs are to children after school and in the summer, and to pre-schoolers all day and year-round.

Also, some remedies to the so-called school lunch "overcertification" problem, if not the right ones, could harm the community programs as well. We believe both that the numbers being tossed around about "overcertification" are exaggerated and that some proposed remedies would drive substantial numbers of eligible children out of the program. (That position also is detailed in an attachment to our testimony.) But because one key entry point to federal nutrition funds for community-based programs turns on the number of children in the community eligible for free and reduced price school meals (when 50 percent of the children in the geographic area are eligible for free or reduced price school lunch, then preschoolers in the area are eligible for CACFP, and children in the area are eligible for summer food and afterschool snacks), any approach that inappropriately depresses school lunch participation will have negative "domino effects" in the community programs.