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MEMORANDUM

November 17, 2009

FROM: Olsson Frank Weeda Terman Bode Matz PC

RE: Senate Agriculture Committee Hearing on Reauthorization of Child Nutrition Programs

On Tuesday, November 17, 2009, the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry held a hearing entitled "Reauthorization of U.S. Child Nutrition Programs: Opportunities to Fight Hunger and Improve Child Health." Below please find an overview of the pertinent information and a brief summary of the hearing.

Attendees

MAJORITY	MINORITY
Chair Lincoln (D-AR)	Ranking Member Chambliss (R-GA)
Senator Harkin (D-IA)	Senator Lugar (R-IN)
Senator Stabenow (D-MI)	Senator Grassley (R-IA)
Senator Brown (D-OH)	
Senator Casey (D-PA)	
Senator Klobuchar (D-MN)	
Senator Gillibrand (D-NY)	
Senator Bennet (D-CO)	

Witness List

Panel I

- The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Panel II

- Dr. Margaret Bogle, Executive Director, Delta Obesity Prevention Research Unit, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Little Rock, Arkansas
- Mr. Rich Huddleston, Executive Director, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, Little Rock, Arkansas
- Ms. Rhonda Sanders, Executive Director, Arkansas Hunger Alliance, Little Rock, Arkansas
- Ms. Jennifer Smith, Director, Compliance, Wal-Mart, Bentonville, Arkansas

Opening Statements

In her opening statement, Chairwoman Lincoln discussed the recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Security Report and the need to address the high rate of children that are suffering from hunger in our nation. She also discussed the high rate of childhood obesity and the toll it is taking on our society, both in terms of individual health issues and rising long-term health care costs. Chair Lincoln outlined her guiding principles for child nutrition reauthorization, which include the following: increased access and participation, improved nutritional quality of meals, and improved integrity and modernization of the programs.

Ranking Member Chambliss discussed the importance of Congressional review of child nutrition programs to ensure effectiveness in combating hunger and obesity. He discussed the recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on meal guidance, stating that many of the recommendations from the report would improve the school meal program greatly. Ranking Member Chambliss mentioned the need to look at uniform standards in schools, but stated that a “one size fits all” approach may not be in the best interest of our children.

Testimony

Panel I

Secretary Vilsack reaffirmed that child nutrition is a top priority for both USDA and the Obama Administration. He also mentioned the recent USDA report on food insecurity and stated that through the fight against hunger and obesity, our food security, nutrition, and learning objectives could be reached, along with the additional benefits of economic recovery and domestic agricultural support. Top Administration priorities for child nutrition reauthorization include the following:

- Reducing barriers and increasing access;
- Increasing the nutrition of meals;
- Increasing the health of the whole school environment, including a la carte and vending;
- Expanding support for breastfeeding through techniques such as peer-to-peer counseling;
- Expanding food safety requirements to all places where food is prepared and stored; and

- Strengthening school wellness policy implementation.

Panel II

Dr. Bogle informed the Committee that childhood obesity often leads to emotional problems in children, which then exacerbates their health problems. She stated that a healthy breakfast is the first step in preventing obesity, as well as towards increasing good behavior and learning skills. She discussed the low-income population in the Arkansas Delta, as well as the lack of access to good food and fresh produce. To address these issues, Dr. Bogle suggested that the Committee continue to support research activities by the Agriculture Research Service, as well as expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in every school.

Mr. Huddleston discussed the economic conditions in Arkansas, stating that many eligible children do not participate in child nutrition programs. To address this, Mr. Huddleston suggested expansion of direct certification and universal eligibility for schools with high percentages of low-income students. He stated that in addition to assisting food insecure children, direct certification would increase program integrity and reduce paperwork for schools.

Ms. Sanders informed the Committee of the rise in childhood hunger in Arkansas, discussing the 22 percent increase in emergency room visits by food insecure children. She also discussed research regarding the tie between food insecurity and increased rates in obesity. Ms. Sanders closed by discussion of the Backpack Program, which provides children with backpacks of food to take home from school over the weekend.

Ms. Smith described the need for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) to move from a paper-based system to an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system. She stated that the current paper transaction process is complicated, expensive, and increases the stigma for participants. Ms. Smith also mentioned that the WIC EBT system should be interoperable, thus avoiding many of the problems of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program transition to an EBT system. Ms. Smith also commented on the dramatic increase in WIC-approved foods due to the new food packages. As a result, she stated, a universal set of guidelines and a centralized product database are necessary.

Discussion Themes

Panel I

Issues discussed during the first question and answer period include the following:

- Increased accountability from schools in the area of quality in exchange for increased reimbursement rates;

- Innovative ways to expand school breakfast participation;
- National standard –
 - Standard for every individual product vs. nutrition guidelines,
 - Standard for school lunch vs. products sold outside the cafeteria, and
 - Possible cost reductions from a national interpretation of standards;
- Meeting increased demand at food banks;
- USDA efforts in working to increase access to child nutrition programs;
- Potential problems in the Department of Defense Fresh Program;
- Focus on prevention to combat health care costs;
- Vending machines in schools;
- Schools as commercial free zones;
- Local production and consumption;
- USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food program;
- Combining the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the School Lunch Act;
- Efforts to combat childhood obesity as it relates to the future health of the country and the military;
- Pay-fors for expansion of programs;
- The After School Meals Act;
- School kitchen modernization;
- Indirect cost limit;
- Encouragement and incentives for schools and children to make healthy choices;
- Banning trans fats in schools;
- Increased food safety and *E. coli* testing in beef;
- Increase of communication of information to schools regarding recalls;
- Child and Adult Care Food Program;
- Increased funding for purchases of whole foods; and
- Posting of caloric content of school meals.

Panel II

Issues discussed during the second question and answer period include the following:

- Research regarding assistance to parents in the home environment;
- Relationship among a poor diet, obesity, and academic test scores;
- Effect of environmental factors on food and exercise choices;
- Consumption of canned and frozen fruits and vegetables in the absences of access to fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Methods to improve the accuracy of direct certification;
- Universal eligibility for Arkansas schools;
- Barriers to healthy eating and exercise for inhabitants of rural areas;

- Nutrition education;
- Head Start;
- Potential changes to the Summer Food Service Program;
- Reasons food insecurity leads to increased rates of childhood obesity;
- Benefits of EBT for the WIC program;
- Consequences of the lack of interoperability in EBT systems; and
- Role of the private sector in maintenance of the central WIC product database.

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We trust that this information is useful. This is intended as a brief overview of the hearing. Please note that the Senators' Opening Statements are attached. Excerpts from Secretary Vilsack's testimony are currently available on the USDA website [here](#). The remaining testimony will be available shortly. Please let us know if you would like copies of the testimony, have any questions, or if you would like further detail regarding any topics in this memorandum.

Attachments (2)

OFW/jam, jab