



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services Hearing
Ending Child Hunger: Priorities for Child Nutrition Reauthorization
Thursday, June 10, 2021 | 12:00 p.m.

Our hearing today is to examine legislative solutions to end child hunger and discuss how we can bolster proven strategies to feed hungry children.

As elected leaders, one of our most basic responsibilities is to make sure that children have enough to eat. Consistent access to nutritious food is a moral imperative and an economic necessity. It is a good investment because it allows children to live healthier and more fulfilling lives, and it provides the next generation with a strong foundation to grow and thrive.

Sadly, child hunger remains a national crisis, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19. Last July, an estimated 14 million children were not getting enough to eat. The families who were already food insecure before the pandemic—disproportionally families of color—fared even worse.

In response, this Committee took swift action to prevent millions of children from going hungry.

We provided critical flexibility through bipartisan legislation to allow schools to offer free meals for all children and have food delivered to families. We created the highly effective Pandemic EBT program, or P-EBT, which lifted at least 2.7 million children out of hunger in its early weeks of implementation. And we eliminated other barriers to getting healthy food into the mouths and bellies of hungry children.

Because of these provisions, as well as the American Rescue Plan, reports of food shortages among households with children fell by 42 percent from January through April.

Although food insecurity has fallen, we know our work is far from over. Our bipartisan commitment to feeding hungry children must be ongoing and unwavering, and must meet the needs in our schools and our communities. It should not matter if the economy is booming or if we're fighting a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. In the United States of America, **no** child should go hungry.

Today, we will focus on the steps we must take to make that aspiration a reality, specifically: reauthorizing federal child nutrition programs, which have not been updated in more than a decade, as well as passing the American Families Plan and American Jobs Plan, which invest more than \$40 billion to provide nutritious meals for children in our communities.

Through these legislative efforts, we have an opportunity to learn from the pandemic and rethink our child nutrition programs to provide **every** child with the healthy food they need to succeed in school and then throughout life.

The American Families Plan would provide more than 9 million additional children with access to free school meals and simplify and streamline program administration by expanding the popular and effective Community Eligibility Provision, or C-E-P.

To best serve children, school meals must also follow nutrition standards that are based on research and science. A 2020 study shows the standards in the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act* correlate to a 47 percent lower rate of childhood obesity for low-income students. The improvements to nutrition standards have made school meals the best source of nutrition for children, but we must make sure these standards are fully implemented. Both the American Families Plan and American Jobs Plan invest in incentivizing healthier school meals and updating school kitchens.

Providing nutrition support after school and during the summer is also critical as students recover from a year of lost classroom time. For example, the American Families Plan makes permanent and nationwide the Summer EBT program, which already provides food assistance to some families during the summer. This program gave more than 70,000 children in Oregon access to meals when school was out.

By reauthorizing child nutrition programs, we can also strengthen the Summer Food Service Program, which serves meals at schools and other community spaces during the summer. During the pandemic, Congress provided the Department of Agriculture with the authority to operate this program throughout the country. Now, we have the chance to make these flexibilities permanent because we know hungry kids do not just reside in our poorest neighborhoods.

Today, we will examine these solutions and discuss how we can work together to provide all children with the nutritious food they need year-round.

I look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses today, and I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Fitzgerald, for his opening statement.