



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

Food for Thought: Examining Federal Nutrition Programs for Young Children and Infants

Wednesday, July 28, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

Today, we are meeting to examine federal nutrition programs that support young children and to discuss our opportunity, and in fact, our responsibility to give all children a healthy start in life.

This hearing will focus on two key programs:

- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or WIC, which serves low-income parents and children, and
- The Child and Adult Care Food Program, or C-A-C-F-P, which serves children and adults in afterschool and care settings.

For decades, these programs have been essential to the healthy development and long-term success of millions of children.

Each month, WIC provides about 6 million people—including over half of all infants—with access to tailored nutrition counseling, healthy food prescriptions, breastfeeding support, and health screenings and referrals.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides the millions of children, and adults, in child care and day care centers across the country with healthy meals and snacks.

But the full effects of these federal nutrition initiatives cannot be understood through numbers, alone. In my home state of Oregon, I have seen—firsthand—the meaningful difference these programs make in the lives of our constituents.

The Oregon Child Development Coalition, OCDC, provides child care education and nutrition services to more than 4,000 children across the state. In 2009, a study analyzing the benefits and areas for improvement of CACFP found that parents rely on the nutrition education and the healthy foods provided for their families through the OCDC, giving parents more confidence even as prices of food and housing rise.

Providers who were interviewed focused on the need to support more children by removing administrative barriers. An updated CACFP will allow providers like

OCDC to continue care and make sure that more children in need can access nutritious foods without raising prices.

This is just one example of the critical role federal programs play in connecting young children and families with healthy food and vital health services. And despite these successes, we know that child hunger, malnutrition, and inadequate access to care persists in many of our communities, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Approximately 1 in 3 households with children struggled with food insecurity in the early stages of the pandemic. For households with *young* children, the lack of access was even worse. Within the first weeks of the pandemic, nearly *half* of all mothers with young children faced food insecurity.

Today, with the help of our distinguished witnesses, we will discuss the next steps we must take towards the goal of ending hunger.

For example, as we work to reauthorize federal child nutrition laws, we must modernize and expand both WIC and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

We can invest in updated technology to eliminate barriers that still prevent families from accessing WIC's lifechanging benefits. And, we can expand the number of meals covered by the Child and Adult Care Food Program, as well as simplify program administration so that more care providers can participate.

In addition, future legislative packages must include significant investments in WIC and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. I applaud President Biden's commitment in the American Families Plan to expand affordable, accessible child care. With any investment to expand and strengthen the care economy, corresponding investments must be provided for early childhood nutrition programs. As we invest in our physical and human infrastructure, basic nutrition support for young children must be a top priority.

I hope today's discussion will lay a strong foundation for our continued work to make certain that all children and infants with the nutrition they need to succeed.

I want to thank our witnesses, again, and I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Fulcher, for his opening statement.