

**Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Robert C. “Bobby” Scott  
AS DELIVERED  
Committee Markup  
The Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016  
(H.R. 5003)  
May 18, 2016  
11:00 am**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, more than 60 years ago, Congress passed the National School Lunch Act, “as a measure of national security, to safeguard health and well-being of our nation’s children.” Through enactment of this first federal child nutrition program, Congress recognized that feeding hungry children was not just a moral imperative, but also vital to the health and security of our nation.

This Committee is tasked with making sure that all children have an equal shot at success, so it’s only fitting that child nutrition programs fall within our Committee’s jurisdiction. Just as there is a federal role in ensuring that every child has access to a quality education regardless of

where they live, what they look like, or their family's income, there is a federal role in ensuring that every child has access to healthy and nutritious food. Research has repeatedly shown that a lack of adequate consumption of specific foods, such as fruits and vegetables, is associated with lower grades among students. Child obesity affects all aspects of children's lives, from their physical well-being, to their academic success and self-confidence.

So if we compromise on what students are served in schools, we are compromised both on their health and their potential for learning. Here we have a choice to make: we can put money into these important programs now and support healthy eating in schools, or we can cut corners and spend more money down the road on chronic diseases or other social services. But either way, we will spend the money. In fact, researchers estimate \$19,000 as the incremental lifetime medical cost of an obese child relative to a normal weight child who maintains that normal weight throughout adulthood.

So it's important to keep this trade off in mind when we talk about reauthorization of child nutrition programs. The hallmark of a good reauthorization is that it makes progress – it moves us forward. It builds on what works and makes improvements on what needs to be improved. Unfortunately this bill reduces nutrition standards, denies benefits to many who are now receiving benefits, and cuts back on after school, out of school and summer services. So with this in mind, Democrats are ready to make improvements to the child nutrition programs and protect progress that has been made.

For example, the great progress on eating healthier and creating a healthier school environment for students. Nutrition standards enacted after the 2010 reauthorization – a reauthorization that passed with bipartisan support – those standards are working. Ninety-nine percent of all schools are meeting the standard. And they are working. Children are eating better foods. Studies show that children now eat up to 16%

more vegetables and 23% more fruit at lunch. We should build on this progress not turn the clock back.

We also see a new attempt to the bill to lay the groundwork to turn child nutrition programs into a block grant, despite the fact that we have found that block grants only erode the value of the programs over time. The Community Development Block Grant saw a 50% reduction in its value from 1998 to 2014 and TANF saw a 31% reduction over the same time. The Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant saw a 36% cut. So the intentions are clear when you go to block grants and the results are to cut budgets instead of feeding our children.

Our work to reauthorize child nutrition programs presents a great opportunity to continue to change the way children eat, to expand their access to nutritious meals, and to end the child hunger crisis in our country. So again, we should ask ourselves if these goals are goals that we are willing to compromise, or whether we need to continue on the path that has resulted in healthier schools and communities.

I yield back Mr. Chairman.