



# OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

## Opening Statement of Chair Bonamici (OR-01)

Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services

*Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service*

Zoom

Thursday, June 23, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

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Today, we are meeting to discuss the Biden-Harris Administration's priorities for federal child nutrition programs and the steps they have taken to prevent and address child hunger.

We can all agree that children need healthy meals to learn and grow.

Despite this consensus, too many children still do not have access to healthy food. In 2018, nearly one in every seven households with children struggled to put enough food on the table.

And as we all know, the pandemic exacerbated this crisis. Just weeks into the pandemic, more than one in every three households with children and nearly half of all mothers with young children struggled with food insecurity.

A year later, in April 2021, food shortages among households with children fell by 42 percent.

This was not by happenstance. Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration acted decisively to deliver relief to families and prevent millions of children from going hungry.

One of the first relief packages—the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*—included provisions based on my bipartisan COVID-19 Child Nutrition Response Act, which gave the USDA critical flexibility to allow schools and community partners to deliver meals to families and offer free meals to **all** children through the Summer Food Service Program.

The bill also created the Pandemic EBT program, or P-EBT, so low-income families that could not physically get to school meal sites could still receive funding to help their children. Research indicates that the P-EBT program has lifted as many as 3.9 million children out of hunger.

I recently visited Chapman Elementary School in Portland, Oregon during the lunch hour and I helped serve meals to students. It was an important reminder that school nutrition staff have been tirelessly working to get meals to kids, even with inflation and supply chain challenges. And hearing directly from an enthusiastic group of third graders about why it is important for every student to have access to healthy meals was an important reminder that our actions here in this committee room have tremendous consequences for the families and children we represent.

I'm excited that, today, the House will vote on the bipartisan *Keep Kids Fed Act* to extend flexibilities from the *Families First Act* and allow schools to continue serving children healthy meals. Without Congressional action, many of these useful flexibilities will expire on June 30, potentially stripping millions of children's access to school meals.

Unfortunately, we know some of the most vulnerable families in our communities are facing additional challenges. After Abbott Nutrition—one of the country’s largest formula manufacturers—recalled many of its formula products, families across the country with young children struggled to find formula they needed. In response, Congress passed the *Access to Baby Formula Act* to make sure that low-income families that use WIC benefits can continue purchasing safe infant formula in times of crisis, such as supply chain disruptions. In Oregon, this legislation provides more than 10,000 infants with better access to formula.

And despite the accomplishments we have made, we have much more work ahead to keep children from going hungry. We must provide urgent relief to help families address the rising costs of everyday goods and deliver sustained support to families to help finally eliminate child hunger.

To that end, House Democrats and a handful of Republicans passed the *Lower Food and Fuel Costs Act*, which will shore up the food and agriculture supply chain and lower the cost of goods at the grocery store.

I will note that most of my Republican colleagues opposed this legislation. I ask my colleagues critical of our attempts to lower costs not to just oppose our efforts, but please work with us and offer solutions to help families put food on the table.

I also invite my colleagues to join Democrats in passing a comprehensive, science-driven federal child nutrition reauthorization.

Regrettably, the underlying federal laws that authorize federal child nutrition programs expired in 2015. Reauthorization is critical to addressing child hunger, and I hope that my Republican colleagues will join Democrats to pass a comprehensive federal child nutrition reauthorization.

The lessons learned from our response to COVID-19 reaffirm that, when we invest in child nutrition programs, we keep children from going hungry. That’s a good investment in the short-term and the long-term.

I want to reiterate a simple fact—to eliminate child hunger, we must deliver these sustained investments in our child nutrition programs.

Thank you, again, Administrator Long, for all you do for our nation’s children. Together, I am confident we can help children reach their full potential.