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COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2101 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6100

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September 23, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
H-307, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker McCarthy, Leader Jeffries, Chair Granger, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As Ranking Member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and Ranking Member of the Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee, we write to underscore the need for any Continuing Resolution (CR) to include emergency funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The insufficient funding included in H.R. 4368, the *Agriculture Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024* (House agriculture appropriations bill), already jeopardizes access to food and critical services for low income pregnant and postpartum women and children by drastically underfunding the program and undermining science-based WIC food benefits. This is especially concerning as the country continues to face an infant and maternal health crisis.

For more than 25 years, there has been a bipartisan commitment to provide sufficient WIC funding to serve all eligible applicants, until now. The House agriculture appropriations bill purports to fund WIC at \$6 billion for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, but the bill also demands a \$500 million rescission in a later section. Realistically, the bill only funds WIC at \$5.5 billion. This is \$800 million below the President's budget request for FY 2024 (\$6.3 billion) and \$185

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million lower than the level of funding made available in FY 2023 (\$5.685 billion). While the WIC funding level requested in the President's Fiscal Year 2024 budget was sufficient to fully fund expected participation and maintain current benefits when it was released, recent data on participation and food costs indicate that WIC will need a significant funding increase above the level requested in the President's budget request to meet its demand, maintain the longstanding no-waitlist commitment, and continue to provide current science-based food benefits.¹

Last month, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) outlined the need for an additional \$1.4 billion² in Fiscal Year 2024 funding for WIC due to a significant increase in participation this fiscal year with a total of 6.7 million women, children, and infants being served by the program (as of June).³ OMB has warned that without additional funding, participants could see disruptions in benefits.⁴ Additionally, the Administration expects participation to continue increasing as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues to ramp up outreach and modernization efforts funded through the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* (ARPA). In order to prevent any disruption to a program crucial to supporting new parents and young children, it is vital that WIC funding be increased to align with projected participation and food costs as the process moves forward. Under the funding levels included in the House agriculture appropriations bill, up to 600,000 eligible new parents and children (predominantly preschoolers, toddlers, and postpartum adults) could possibly be turned away from the program.⁵

While WIC participation is increasing, the House agriculture appropriations bill also drastically cuts WIC's increased science-backed fruit and vegetable benefits for roughly 1.5 million pregnant and postpartum participants and 3.5 million children aged 1 to 4.⁶ The bill reduces the monthly fruit and vegetable benefit from \$25 to \$11 for child participants, from \$44 to \$13 for pregnant and postpartum participants, and from \$49 to \$15 for breastfeeding participants. Current benefit levels ensure that participating women and children have access to

¹ U.S. Dep't of Agric., WIC Data Tables, Food and Nutrition Serv. (Sept. 8, 2023), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program>.

² Tony Romm, *White House asks Congress to pass short-term spending deal, boost food aid*, THE WASH. POST (Aug. 31, 2023, 9:00 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/08/31/white-house-congressional-spending-government-shutdown/>.

³ U.S. Dep't of Agric., WIC Data Tables, Food and Nutrition Serv. (Sept. 8, 2023), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program>.

⁴ Juliana Kaplan & Ayelet Sheffey, *Biden's asking Congress for a budget Band-Aid. It'll make student loan repayment easier, secure Social Security and food benefits – and avoid a government shutdown*, BUSINESS INSIDER (Aug. 31, 2023), <https://www.businessinsider.com/biden-funding-social-security-student-loan-repayment-wic-food-benefits-2023-8>.

⁵ Zoe Neuberger, *Young Children and New Parents in Every State Could Be Turned Away From WIC or Have Their Benefits Cut Under Pending Appropriations Bills*, CTR. ON BUDGET AND POL'Y PRIORITIES (Sept. 12, 2023, 9:00 AM), <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/young-children-and-new-parents-in-every-state-could-be-turned-away-from-wic-or-have-their>.

⁶ Katie Bergh & Zoe Neuberger, House Republicans' Agriculture Appropriations Bill Would Cut WIC Benefits for 5 Million Participants, Put SNAP Benefits at Risk for 1 Million Older Adults, CTR. ON BUDGET AND POL'Y PRIORITIES (May 2023), <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/5-18-23fa.pdf>.

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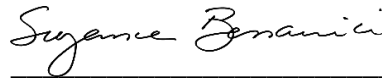
recommended levels of fruits and vegetables, thus improving health outcomes and program retention. Pre-pandemic benefits of \$8 for children and \$11 for pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding participants allowed for less than a one cup equivalent of fruits and vegetables per day, woefully short of the recommended amounts.⁷

In sum, any Continuing Resolution that fails to provide the necessary emergency funding would jeopardize the program, likely forcing eligible children and postpartum applicants onto waiting lists and denying them vital nutrition benefits and WIC services that are critical for healthy development. We urge you to ensure that WIC funding is adequate to meet the need.

Sincerely,



ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce



SUZANNE BONAMICI
Ranking Member
Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary
Education Subcommittee
Committee on Education and the Workforce

⁷ THE NAT'L ACADS. OF SCI., ENG'G, AND MED., REVIEW OF WIC FOOD PACKAGES: IMPROVING BALANCE AND CHOICE (The Nat'l Acads. Press 2017), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK435902/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK435902.pdf.