



November 13, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair, Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Appropriations
Committee
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chair, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration
U.S. House of Representatives

Re: Funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Heinrich, Ranking Member Hoeven, Chair Harris, and Ranking Member Bishop,

As Chair and Vice-Chair of the California Women's Caucus, we are concerned about the wellbeing of and continuity of services for California families who are served by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). We know that for decades, WIC has strengthened food security, improved diet quality, and supported a strong start in life for California children. Nearly one million California women, infants, and children each month benefit from WIC, and recent data shows participation exceeding previous projections as more families are accessing WIC's vital nutrition services. In recognition of WIC's health benefits and increasing participation, we respectfully call on Congress to fully fund WIC for fiscal year 2024 to sustain current benefits, including the cash value benefit (CVB) for fruit and vegetables and increasing participation.

WIC has a proven track record of reducing hunger, improving diet quality, and preventing disease. WIC participants are four times more likely to be food secure than eligible non-participantsⁱ, and enrollment during pregnancy is associated with a decreased risk of household food insecurity after birthⁱⁱ. When introduced in 2009, WIC's fruit and vegetable

cash value benefit (CVB) significantly increased consumption of fresh and frozen vegetables for WIC participantsⁱⁱⁱ. The CVB bump passed by Congress in 2021 and extended on a bipartisan basis in subsequent appropriations legislation further increased fruit and vegetable consumption by an average of ¼ cup per day^{iv}.

WIC participation is increasing – in California, there are over 160,000 additional participants now compared to pre-pandemic levels. In February 2020, there were 808,000 total participants, which has grown to 972,000 total participants as of June 2023, representing a substantial 20% increase in participation since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Child participation has particularly soared, from 456,000 children in February 2020 to 587,000 children (29% increase) in June 2023^v. Growing participation reflects WIC’s reduction of administrative barriers through modernization efforts and flexibility, the efficacy of the fruit and vegetable benefit, as well as rising food costs.

If WIC does not receive the necessary investment for FY24, hundreds of thousands of children and postpartum women will be turned away from the program^{vi}. Moreover, a lack of additional resources could further lead local WIC agencies to take measures to bring spending in line with available funds, such as scaling back outreach efforts, reducing clinic staff, shortening clinic hours, or even turning away eligible applicants.

The proposed \$6.3 billion funding level for WIC in the Senate Agriculture appropriations bill (S. 2131) would require states to turn away an estimated 600,000 children and postpartum women, over 100,000 of whom reside in California. Failure to provide WIC with the resources to serve projected caseloads jeopardizes the health and well-being of thousands of mothers and young children. The House Agriculture appropriations bill (H.R. 4368) funds WIC at \$6 billion, with a \$500 million rescission. This bill, if enacted, would not only result in eligible applicants getting turned away, but those enrolled in WIC would see their fruit and vegetable benefit cut by 56 to 70 percent, reducing access to healthy fruit and vegetables for another 4.7 million participants.

Since 1997, there has been a bipartisan agreement in Congress to provide WIC with the resources necessary to serve every eligible woman, infant, and child. We strongly urge our counterparts in Washington to honor this commitment, providing an urgently needed investment in a Continuing Resolution and fully funding WIC in the FY24 Appropriations law so that no parent or child is turned away from the program and no participant has their benefits cut. We urge both the House and Senate to continue their bipartisan support for full funding of WIC so that mothers and their young children can lead a food and nutrition-secure healthy life.

Sincerely,



Nancy Skinner
California State Senate, District 9
Chair, Legislative Women’s Caucus



Cecilia Aguiar-Curry
California State Assembly, District 4
Vice Chair, Legislative Women’s Caucus

ⁱ <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2022.306967?role=tab>

ⁱⁱ https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK579797/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK579797.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7666910/>

^{iv} <https://media.nwica.org/nwa-multi-state-cvb-report-march-2022.pdf>

^v <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program>

^{vi} [7-26-23fa.pdf \(cbpp.org\)](https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program)