



New School Nutrition Standards Support Healthier and Well-fed Children

Food Research and Action Center FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | Contact: Jennifer Adach, 202.986.2200 x3018

Washington, D.C. – September 27, 2012 – The “No Hungry Kids Act,” as introduced by Representatives Steve King (R-Iowa) and Tim Huelskamp (R-Kansas), would repeal the new school meal nutrition standards and outlaw any rule setting a limit on the number of calories a school could provide in a federally-reimbursed school lunch. Such attempts are misguided, ignore science and good sense, neglect to acknowledge that children can now get additional servings of fruits and vegetables, and risk the future health of America’s school children.

Specifically, Reps. King and Huelskamp’s bill would eliminate the new requirements that were included in the child nutrition reauthorization bill passed by Congress in 2010, included in USDA rules in 2011, and finalized with defense to 130,000 public comments – most of them supporting a healthy overhaul of school meal standards – and effective beginning in the 2012-2013 school year. These new standards increase the availability of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lower fat milk in school meals; reduce the levels of sodium, saturated fat and trans fat in meals; and meet the nutrition needs of school children within their calorie requirements. In addition, the Act adds specific language to the school lunch law to “prohibit(s) the USDA’s upper caloric limit.”

“The new standards incorporate scientific recommendations made by the Institute of Medicine and numerous nutrition and public health experts, and bring school meals in line with the nation’s dietary guidelines. Developing nutrition policy in school meals should be left to experts and not to the Congressional political process,” said FRAC President Jim Weill. “These are strong, science-based standards that are aimed at meeting the nutrition needs of all students.”

While much of the criticism of the new standards focuses on the calorie ranges, FRAC noted that the new healthier meal calorie ranges follow the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommendations. The calorie ranges -- establishing both minimum and maximum amounts of calories -- address concerns about both childhood hunger and obesity. They allow schools to provide age-appropriate meals while avoiding excessive caloric intake. The calorie ranges were carefully calculated based on the Dietary Reference Intakes: Energy, Carbohydrate, Fiber, Fat, Fatty Acids, Cholesterol, Protein and Amino Acids and the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. The calorie needs of each age group were allocated proportionately throughout the meals in a day.

Rep. King has written in an op-ed that children are hungry by the end of the school day. Any parent knows that lots of children are hungry after school – a function of how children develop and not of new calorie limits. But hungry children can ask for more fruits and vegetables, and the new nutrition standards are only one of several new improvements to the federal child nutrition programs aimed at ensuring children have access to healthy meals before, during, and after school. Congress has broadened the reach of the Afterschool Meal Program so every state can offer children who are engaged in afterschool activities a snack or (depending on the length of the program) a meal. And these offerings have to be nutritious too.

“The new standards are an important step forward in efforts to remedy nutritional shortfalls in children’s diets and to help address the nation’s serious obesity problem as well as its serious hunger problem,” said Weill. “They are especially important to low-income children, and attempts to discard nutrition science are shortsighted and harmful.”

Low-income children are vulnerable to obesity and poor nutrition because of risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources, limited access to healthy and affordable foods, fewer opportunities for

physical activity, high levels of stress, greater exposure to obesity-related marketing, and limited access to health care. Given all of these challenges, school meal programs play an important role in improving the health of low-income children.

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