



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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May 11, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Chambliss:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, National Catholic Educational Association, and National Catholic Rural Life Conference, we urge you to provide the strongest possible funding for critical improvements to federal child nutrition programs which will promote greater access to low-income children, expand outreach, and provide better nutrition in order to ensure that all children get the healthy food they need to grow.

The recent economic crisis, rising food prices and the growing number of people who are hungry and in need of nutrition assistance make reauthorization of the *Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004* (P.L. 108-265) ever more urgent. We supported congressional efforts and appreciated your leadership in the nutrition title of the 2008 Farm bill and during the FY09 federal budget deliberations seeking full funding and program improvements in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps Program), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and for child nutrition reauthorization.

In spite of these recent legislative efforts, the current economic situation is still causing an increase in the number of people facing hunger or at risk of hunger. We see the faces of the working poor, the unemployed, children and the elderly in our soup kitchens, congregate dining facilities, food pantries, in our schools and parishes, and in our shelters. A recent snapshot survey released by Catholic Charities agencies across the country reported an increase of 82 percent in requests for food services and 32 percent reported food shortages during the 2008 holiday season.

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the U.S. bishops insist that “Our commitment to the dignity of every person requires special concern for those who are poor and vulnerable, whose needs are greatest, and whose lives and dignity are often threatened by hunger, poverty, and suffering.” For millions of children and adults living in poverty, participation in these important federal nutrition programs is critical to their well-being and development. Programs like WIC reach children at the most important stage of their development, from before birth

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through age five. WIC not only provides nutritional supplemental assistance for mothers and their young children but is also an important source of nutrition and health education for the whole family.

We support necessary technical and administrative improvements to streamline the enrollment process in order to expand program access and participation of low-income children. For example, the newly implemented provision that requires school districts to directly certify children from families receiving SNAP benefits (food stamps) is a positive step forward. State agencies and local educational agencies should be encouraged and provided with the necessary funding to do the same for families receiving benefits from TANF and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), as well as homeless, runaway and migrant children, as allowed by current law. Simplifying the process for administrators, participating institutions and for families, particularly those facing literacy or language barriers, is an important improvement for these programs to be effective in reaching those most in need.

It is also important that administrative hurdles be reduced for participating institutions. There are 3,680 Catholic schools nationwide participating in Federal School Nutrition Programs in the current academic year. In the 2007-2008 academic year, they served 90,636 breakfasts and 190,441 lunches to students in those schools. The vast majority of participating Catholic schools also participate in the milk program. A critical challenge identified by participating schools is meeting the higher expenses, due to the rising price of food and energy, but also the labor costs involved in providing more nutritious meals. The federal reimbursement rate must compensate for these higher costs.

As you face the difficult budget decisions, we ask you to remember that federal child nutrition programs provide children and families with access to food, a healthier diet and nutrition education in a manner that also fairly supports agriculture in the United States.

We urge your support in providing full funding for program improvements in WIC and federal child nutrition programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "William F. Murphy".

Bishop William F. Murphy

Diocese of Rockville Center

Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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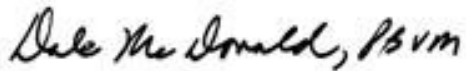
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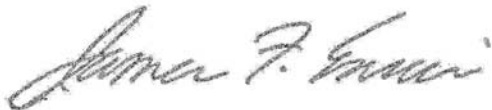
Most Rev. Thomas J. Curry
Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles
Chairman, Committee on Catholic Education



Rev. Larry Snyder
President
Catholic Charities USA



Sr. Dale McDonald, PBVM, PhD
Director of Public Policy
National Catholic Educational Association



James Ennis
Executive Director
National Catholic Rural Life Conference

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry