



Child Nutrition Reauthorization Listening Session
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Boston, MA

Testimony of
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Good morning. My name is Connie Rizoli, Director of Public Policy for Project Bread – The Walk for Hunger. Project Bread is the only statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to alleviating, preventing, and ultimately ending hunger in Massachusetts. Project Bread sponsors the annual Walk for Hunger, runs a statewide hotline for hungry people, funds 400 emergency food programs each year, and develops hunger prevention programs that feed hungry children where they live, learn, and play. Increasing participation in federal nutrition programs is a crucial component of our efforts. We work closely with school food service directors around the state to increase participation in school meals as a way to improve access to additional nutrition among food insecure families.

The importance of providing school breakfast and lunch to low-income children is well documented. Consider that low-income children who participate in these programs receive more than 60 percent of their calories while at school. For these children in poverty, every calorie counts. We must ensure that while in school, children are receiving food low in sugar, high in fiber, low in saturated fat, and free of trans fats. The most current research reinforces the nutritional importance of eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

Many food service directors are serving these kinds of healthy foods, and we applaud them for that. Yet, under the current USDA guidelines for Child Nutrition Programs, food such as fortified doughnuts, sugar-coated cereals, chicken nuggets, hot dogs on a white bun, French fries, pepperoni pizza and frosted toaster pastries are still being served in many public schools precisely because these foods **do** meet current USDA guidelines.

Therefore, our highest priority is that the guidelines for school meals should be updated in a timely fashion to be consistent with the USDA's 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It is our understanding that changes in these guidelines will not take effect until 2010, the same year that USDA will be announcing **new** changes to the dietary guidelines. A system must be developed that will allow guidelines for school

meals to be updated at regular intervals in tandem with USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Second, it is imperative that school systems have the fiscal capability to purchase the healthy food that they serve. We are all painfully aware of the skyrocketing cost of food in the United States. School systems, already struggling under the weight of rapidly increasing fuel costs, are now scrambling to find ways to provide school meals to children while staying within their budgets. Many schools that have improved the quality of their school meals may now find themselves having to revert to less healthy alternatives as a cost saving measure.

To meet this double challenge of providing healthier food in a time of cost escalation, the federal reimbursement for school meals must be dramatically adjusted. According to the CRS Report for Congress issued on April 10, 2008, "U.S. food prices rose 4 percent in 2007 and are expected to gain 3.5 percent to 4.5 percent in 2008."¹ This is the highest increase in the cost of food in 17 years. Yet, the most recent increase in subsidies has, according to the CRS Report, only increased by less than half a percentage point, from 2.9 percent to 3.3 percent from the 2005-2006 school year to the 2007-2008 school year.²

Clearly, the federal government must adjust school reimbursements upward to reflect the reality of rising food costs. In addition, we would highly recommend that the guidelines and reimbursement adjustments be made for all child nutrition programs, including the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

The link between healthy eating and good health is clear and direct. The incidence of childhood obesity is truly alarming. By 2004 in the United States, the percentage of American children who were overweight or at risk of becoming overweight included 26 percent of two- to five-year-olds, 37 percent of six- to eleven-year-olds, and 34 percent of twelve- to nineteen-year-olds.³

While our highest priorities are improving the standards for the quality of school meals coupled with adjusting upward the federal reimbursement rate for these meals, Project Bread also has several other recommendations for improving the Child Nutrition Programs that we will submit at a later date in written form.

¹ Capehart, T., and Richardson, J., **Food Price Inflation: Causes and Impacts**, CRS Report for Congress, April 10, 2008.

² Capehart, T., and Richardson, J. op. cit. (see note 1)

³ Ogden, C., M., Curtin, L., McDowell, M., Tabak, C., and Flegal M., **Prevalence of Overweight Among U.S. Children and Adolescents**, Journal of the American Medical Association, 2006.