

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On “H.R.5504, Improving Nutrition for America’s Children Act”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “H.R.5504, Improving Nutrition for America’s Children Act”.*

Good morning.

This morning we’ll discuss the new bipartisan child nutrition legislation we introduced earlier this month to address critical health and economic needs in this country.

We are on the brink of a national health crisis that is affecting our youngest children. Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years.

Nearly one in three children is obese.

The frightening reality in many doctors offices is very young children presenting with adult onset health problems like diabetes and heart disease.

At the same time, over 16 million children are hungry and live in households where families are struggling to put food on the table.

In this economy, families are faced with the difficult and daunting choices of paying their bills and keeping the lights on or putting food on the table. They simply do not have enough resources to make ends meet.

For these families, the federal child nutrition programs provide a nutritional safety net.

They help parents avoid this painful choice between basic necessities. This makes the role of these programs increasingly important.

We cannot ignore the fact that for millions of children, the only meals that they can count on are those they get at school or in child care.

Hunger affects every aspect of children’s lives, including their ability to keep up with their peers and achieve academically.

If children are hungry, they can't focus and they can't learn. If we do nothing, if we allow these children's health to deteriorate, and jeopardize their success in school, we compromise their ability to grow into healthy, productive adults.

Research shows that healthy eating and a child's ability to focus and benefit from classroom time are absolutely linked.

The federal child nutrition programs provide us with a tremendous opportunity to help change children's lives and the future of this country by not just feeding children healthier meals but teaching them about the importance of healthy choices.

If we educate our children about the importance of nutrition early, they can develop healthy habits that will translate in to a lifetime of healthy eating and healthy living.

This is why we need to place so much emphasis on healthy nutrition and education in child care and for mothers in the Women, Infants and Children program.

This won't be the first time that we took to the classrooms to help stop a national health crisis.

How did we get people to stop smoking? We educated kids about the dangers of smoking and they talked about it with their parents.

Why do people use seatbelts? Their kids were educated about it in school and then they came home and made sure their parents wore their seatbelts in their cars and now they do.

Education has mastered many of the difficult problems in this country.

If we work in the schools to both increase nutritional opportunities and educate kids about the food they're eating, we have a chance to really dramatically drive down future health care costs. And we have a real opportunity to ensure our children will be able to reach for success and live healthier lives.

At Dover Elementary and Richmond Elementary in my district, the kids help take care of a school garden. They use it for the biology class, they use it for zoology class, and they use it for the art class.

But most importantly, they're eating the products of their garden, they're understanding the richness of fresh fruits and vegetables and they're taking what they learned in the garden back home with them to teach their parents about healthy living.

This is the type of program that we want to replicate in the legislation we introduced.

We want to empower schools across the country to start their own gardens, to run green cafeterias, to accept nothing but the highest quality food in schools in the cafeteria and in vending machines.

We want to empower schools to help improve meal quality, to change children's lives and take the issue of children's health seriously.

The Improving Nutrition for America's Children Act will help accomplish this task by making four important improvements in America's children nutrition programs:

First, we streamline and increase access for children to healthy nutritious food during the school day.

Second, we work to improve food safety and the recall process in our schools.

Third, we increase the reimbursement rate for the first time in over 30 years to better support schools ability to offer healthy school meals.

Lastly, we provide opportunities for year-round service, on weekends, during vacation and holidays and during the summer because hunger and children's nutritional needs do not take a summer vacation.

This is smart policy that responds to a significant need to help improve children's health.

We have many partners in this effort including health organizations, anti-hunger organizations, school and nutrition organizations, teachers and parents, who really want better nutrition in their schools. We also have the help of Michelle Obama.

With her "Let's Move" initiative, the First Lady has lent her leadership, her vision and her knowledge to help end the childhood obesity crisis and to bring national attention to the problems facing our country.

This bill answers her call and moves us closer to meeting President Obama's challenge to end childhood hunger in America.

The issues of child hunger and poor nutrition require immediate action, and a joint effort between government, communities, families, schools, and the unwavering support of advocates. The nation's greatest treasure is at risk and our children deserve the chance to reach for more and to pursue opportunities that will drive this country to even greater heights.

It's clear now is the time to get America's families and children back on the road to healthy eating and healthier living.

Our witnesses here today will tell us what is really at stake and why this bill is so absolutely critical.

Thank you for being here today.

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