

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Markup of HR 5504, the
“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 mark-up of HR 5504, the “Improving Nutrition for America’s Children Act”

Good afternoon.

Today the Education and Labor Committee considers the “Improving Nutrition for America’s Children Act.”

At our hearing about this bill two weeks ago, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack urged this Committee and this Congress to take action to improve the nutritional opportunities for our children.

The First Lady has made ending childhood obesity and improving children’s health her top priority.

Her “Let’s Move” campaign relies on the actions Congress will take to substantially improve our school meals programs.

Recognizing her efforts and our urgent need for action, Congressman Platts, Congresswoman McCarthy and Congressman McGovern and I introduced this bill earlier this month for a few very simple reasons.

First, in a country as great as ours, no child should go hungry. Federal child nutrition programs can and should play a vital role in giving our children access to the nutritious foods they need year round to thrive in the classroom and in life.

Second, the cost of childhood obesity to the health of our children and our economy is staggering. If we don’t take action now, the future of our country is at stake.

Third, the risks associated with food recalls and contaminated foods are very real and deserve immediate attention.

We now have an opportunity to make dramatic reforms that address these issues to ensure that our child nutrition programs actually work in the best interest of our children and our country.

The legislation will accomplish this task by starting first with our youngest children – including infants and toddlers who participate in the WIC program and in child care settings – by instilling healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

The bill will increase the number of eligible children in the school meals programs by using existing Medicaid, S-CHIP and other available data to directly certify children for who meet income requirements without requiring extra paperwork.

And because hunger and children's nutritional needs don't take a vacation, our bill will create year-round meal service for schools to provide meals to children during the school year when school is not in session, like on the weekends, holidays and during the summer.

This bill also makes bold investments to drastically improve the overall quality of the child nutrition meals.

It was very clear to us that child nutrition programs need to be modernized.

We have to get rid of the junk food, get rid of the endless sugar and empty calories in our schools.

Instead, our schools need to implement improved nutritional standards that follow the recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

This means serving whole grains, vegetables, fat free and reduced fat dairy products.

We heard from schools who say they want to serve healthier meals, but they're limited by dwindling resources.

That's why we decided that the best use of resources in this bill would be to increase the reimbursement rate for lunch by six cents.

This is the first real increase in the program in over 30 years.

But in order to receive the increase, schools have to comply with the updated meal requirements based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

We also, for the first time, require minimum standards for foods served outside the cafeteria, like in vending machines.

By setting these minimum standards and by making these important investments, we fulfill the promise to our children of a healthy future.

We will also improve school food safety by improving the recall procedures to support better communication between agencies and to speed up notification to schools.

We also ensure foodservice employees can have access to training to prevent and identify risky food borne illness.

There are also provisions in the bill to strengthen public-private partnerships in communities across the country.

We know providing our children with healthy meals is a matter of national importance and of national security.

At our hearing two weeks ago, we learned from Mission Readiness that over one quarter of all Americans from age 17 to 24 are too heavy to join the military.

We also know this is a matter of public health.

Higher rates of obesity translate into higher rates of obesity-related diseases, like diabetes, high cholesterol and heart disease – diseases normally found in adults. When kids develop these health problems early, we know it leads to shorter life spans, less productivity in the workforce, and higher long term health care costs for the country.

The case for this legislation is absolutely clear. We will fulfill our promise to our children in a fiscally responsible way.

This bill has to be on the must-pass list of legislation to pass this year. Our children's health is too important to allow inaction.

I'd like again to thank Congresswoman McCarthy for her unyielding determination on this bill. As a former nurse, she has a unique perspective on the urgency behind this legislation.

I'd also like again to thank Congressman Platts for his leadership and commitment to helping our children. Congressman Platts has told us that he often eats school meals with his sons. It's time we improve the meals for his sons and for all our children.

I urge all my colleagues to support this bill.

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