



May 17, 2016

The Honorable John Kline
2439 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
1201 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Todd Rokita
1717 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marcia Fudge
2344 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, Subcommittee Chairman Rokita and Subcommittee Ranking Member Fudge:

National PTA and our nearly 4 million members—which include parents, teachers, students, administrators and community leaders—write to express our opposition to the “Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016” (H.R. 5003). The bill in its current form would roll back years of progress towards healthy nutrition standards for school meals and would limit the number of low-income children receiving free and reduced-price meals.

Of great concern to National PTA is a provision in the bill that would limit the number of times a school can contact families encouraging them to participate in the school meals program to only two times per school year. One of PTA’s founding principles is its dedication to engage families in their child’s education, which research has shown improves student outcomes. Limiting the amount of communication a school may have with families on any issue is detrimental to the school environment and student learning. Parents and families have a right to know what school-based opportunities are provided to their child throughout the year, which includes opportunities to improve the health and nutrition of their child. National PTA strongly encourages the Education and the Workforce Committee to remove this language from the bill during markup.

It is also imperative to our association that school nutrition standards are maintained from the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. The House bill would exempt cultural foods from the whole grain-rich requirements and further delay the reduction of sodium targets, despite the fact that the United States Department of Agriculture has reported 98.5% of schools are successfully meeting the updated nutrition standards. Furthermore, National PTA works with our local members nationwide to improve school meals and incorporate Smart Snack guidelines in their school fundraisers through our [Healthy Lifestyles program](#), which has produced great results nationwide—such as selling healthy snacks at school stores and school-wide run-a-thons. Therefore, our organization does not support the exemption of school fundraisers from the Smart Snack guidelines when a countless number of schools have held successful fundraisers that are healthy and nutritious.



National PTA is also concerned with language in the bill that raises the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) threshold from 40% to 60%. Currently, the CEP benefits 18,000 schools serving 8.5 million children in low-income neighborhoods. Our association is pleased to see more students receiving healthy school meals due to the implementation of the CEP, which reduced the stigma children and families faced while participating in the free and reduced price school meals program. However, if the CEP threshold were raised from 40% to 60%, it would hinder access to the program for more than 7,000 schools and millions of children.

Additionally, the bill dramatically increases school meal application verification requirements in ways that inevitably would cause eligible students to lose access to free or reduced-price school meals. Under the proposal, the number of household applications to be verified would increase significantly, creating unnecessary paperwork burdens for schools and families. A disproportionate number of the most vulnerable families, such as those who are homeless, migrant, immigrant or have limited English proficiency would be particularly likely to fall through the cracks in the process and lose access to school meals, even though they are eligible.

There are some provisions that National PTA was encouraged to see in the bill such as the language to increase the reimbursement for the school breakfast program. Our association is also a strong supporter of the School Food Modernizations Act (H.R. 3316) and was pleased to see provisions in the bill that provide U.S. loan guarantees and competitive grants to update school kitchen equipment and facilities.

National PTA opposes the Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016 in its current form for the issues that are listed above. We look forward to working with the Education and the Workforce Committee to improve the overall bill. Any bill passed by the Committee must maintain current school nutrition standards and continue to provide access to free and reduced-price meals for low-income children.

If you have questions about this letter or National PTA's position on other aspects of the bill, please contact National PTA's Government Affairs Manager Joshua Westfall at jwestfall@pta.org or (703) 518-1249.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura M. Bay".

Laura M. Bay
President
National PTA

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan R. Monell".

Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA