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U.S. Rep. Moore, colleagues: Lead 112 House and Senate colleagues in urging USDA to update the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program For Women, Infants, Children (WIC) food packages, ensure access to healthy food for low-income families

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI-4), U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Representative Don Young (R-AK-At Large), and led 112 of their Senate and House colleagues in writing a bipartisan, bicameral letter urging U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack to take swift action to issue the proposed rule, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children: Revisions in the WIC Food Packages. WIC is one of the most successful federally funded nutrition programs in the country, improving dietary and health outcomes for roughly 6 million pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age 5. The letter also urges the Secretary to ensure that the proposed rule revise the WIC food packages to align with dietary recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) by allowing beneficiaries to purchase more fruits, vegetables, and lower-mercury seafood and imposing stronger standards for whole grains, sugar content, calcium, and protein.

“We should give vulnerable children every resource available support to grow

healthy and strong," **said Rep. Moore**. "With this proposed rule change, WIC food packages would better meet the needs of mothers and their babies and give them greater access to healthy produce, such as fresh fruits and vegetables. I join Senator Gillibrand and my other colleagues in calling on the USDA to support NASEM's recommendations and quickly implement this rule. Our mothers and babies deserve the best!"

"Providing healthier food options in WIC food packages has been shown to reduce childhood obesity and enhance other long-term health outcomes," **said Senator Gillibrand**. "As food prices skyrocket nationwide, it is more important than ever to ensure that low-income families can afford to put nutritious food on the table. I urge Secretary Vilsack to expeditiously issue revised WIC food package guidelines in keeping with federal dietary recommendations. This ruling has been delayed for far too long and it is imperative that we give WIC participants the resources they need to maximize their WIC dollars."

"The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program helps low-income women to purchase healthy foods for themselves and their infants and toddlers to ensure they get off to a strong, healthy start. Nutrition scientists have been clear in their recommendations: pregnant and post-partum women and young children benefit from eating lower-mercury fish, and that WIC's approved food packages should include more fish," **said Senator Murkowski.** "For several years, I have encouraged the inclusion of more healthy, nutritious fish—like Alaska's wild salmon—in more WIC food packages. I am pleased to join Senator Gillibrand in leading a letter to Secretary Vilsack encouraging him to swiftly propose new regulations that will include more lower-mercury fish, as well as more fruits and vegetables, in the WIC program."

"I am a strong advocate for the WIC program, which has a proven track record of supporting mothers in accessing healthy foods for themselves and their kids," **said Congressman Young**. "The science is clear: fruits, vegetables, and seafood are healthy nutritional options that greatly benefit the health and development of children. The WIC food packages must be revised to reflect that, and I am proud to join Senators Murkowski and Gillibrand, in addition to Congresswoman Moore, on a letter to encourage the Agriculture Secretary to swiftly implement reforms that make healthier, more natural food options eligible to be purchased by WIC beneficiaries."

"The WIC benefit bump has proven to be one of the most significant investments in

nutrition security, increasing access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables for more than 4.7 million WIC participants. USDA can build on this progress by revising the WIC food packages as soon as possible," s**aid Brian Dittmeier, Senior Director of Public Policy for the National WIC Association.** "Science-based recommendations provide a blueprint for how expanded WIC food packages can invest in underconsumed food groups like fruits, vegetables, and seafood to further align participants' diets with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. We applaud this bipartisan, bicameral effort led by Senators Gillibrand and Murkowski and Representatives Moore and Young to increase the amount of nutritious foods provided to WIC families and build a bridge to a modern WIC program that more robustly addresses the nutrient needs of participating families."

"In Wisconsin, we have seen the impact of WIC's nutritious food package on the health of our families. With the temporary WIC benefit bump, we have already seen children consume an additional ¼ cup of fruit and vegetables per day, which has the potential to counter increasing childhood obesity rates as a result of the pandemic," **said Camen Haessig, Chair of the Wisconsin WIC Association**. "Long-term changes to WIC's food package – including added fruits and vegetables, seafood options, and other flexibilities – would allow our WIC participants more variety in their diet and a smoother shopping experience. The Wisconsin WIC Association urges USDA to advance this rulemaking and thanks Rep. Moore for her leadership."

"Families who receive WIC benefits have always appreciated the healthy foods provided in the WIC food package. In recent months, with the temporary increase in the WIC food package for fruits and vegetables, it has become evident that WIC families need and want more nutrient-dense foods in their diets. It is time for USDA to issue a food package rule which focuses on the increased need for fruits, vegetables, and lower mercury fish in the WIC food package as the 2017 NASEM report supports. On behalf of the WIC Association of NYS, I would like to thank Senator Gillibrand for her commitment to WIC families and for her co-leadership in the Senate urging USDA to issue a timely food package rule," **said Lauren Brand, Chair of the WIC Association of New York State**.

"On behalf of the Alaska WIC Association, I want to thank Sen. Murkowski and Rep. Young for their ongoing support of the expanded WIC food package," **said Patrick Ayres, President of the Alaska WIC Association**. "Alaska's high food costs and limited availability make food security a real issue in remote Alaska. The women, infants, and children of Alaska are amongst the most nutritionally vulnerable in

society. The availability of nutritious, affordable food is critical for their physical and cognitive development. I ask for your continued support of the expanded WIC food package."

"The Alliance to End Hunger applauds the commitment of Senators Gillibrand and Murkowski and Congressmembers Moore and Young to increasing access to nutritious foods and we join them in urging USDA to move forward with reviewing the WIC food package," **said Eric Mitchell, Executive Director of The Alliance to End Hunger.** "The food package review should prioritize including a wider variety of healthy foods for WIC families – opening up access to foods that would otherwise be unattainable for many low-income individuals. Updating the food package is a necessary and common-sense next step to ensuring a healthier future for low-income families, and we look forward to working with USDA on the review."

"The WIC program is one of our country's most effective tools in establishing healthful eating habits," **said registered dietitian nutritionist Kevin L. Sauer, the 2021-2022 President of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.** "The Academy supports this bipartisan, bicameral effort to ensure the WIC food package can align with the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans and is proud to offer our support to this important initiative."

"When the WIC food package added a fruit and vegetable benefit thirteen years ago, it was revolutionary in increasing access and improving dietary quality for families. Unfortunately, the benefit has not kept pace with costs and Dietary Guidelines' consumption recommendations**," said Mollie Van Lieu, Vice President of Nutrition and Health at the International Fresh Produce Association**. "Congress and USDA stepped up during the pandemic to triple the benefit amount, but USDA must implement a permanent solution to provide consistency to the supply chain, and most importantly, the women and children who rely on this monthly allotment. We thank Senators Gillibrand and Murkowski and Representatives Moore and Young for their leadership on this issue and ask that USDA to swiftly update the food package to align with the 2017 NASEM recommendations."

"It's incredibly important that WIC food packages are routinely reviewed so that WIC-enrolled families are able to obtain the critical nutrition they need to thrive. Alarmingly, WIC food packages haven't been reviewed since 2009. Think of all that has changed in the world since then. Rising food prices, paired with lingering economic challenges brought on by COVID-19, are forcing an unprecedented

number of families to rely on WIC to purchase nutritious food. Therefore, it's of the utmost importance to ensure WIC offerings align with the current recommended dietary guidelines," **said Cassidy Pont, Manager of Child Nutrition Policy at Save the Children**. "That's why we're thrilled to see bipartisan leadership elevating this crucial issue. It's our sincere hope that the USDA takes immediate action. Kids and families need better and more regular access to nutritious foods – their livelihoods depend on it."

The letter was led by Representatives Gwen Moore (D-WI-4) and Don Young (R-AK-At large) in the House and Senator Gillibrand and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) in the Senate and. It was also signed by Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Tina Smith (D-MN), Bob Casey (D-PA), Ed Markey (D-MA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Gary Peters (D-MI), Patty Murray (D-WA), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Angus King (I-ME), Jack Reed (D-RI), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-1), Jake Auchincloss (D-MA-4), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX-18), Jerrold Nadler (D-NY-10), Jimmy Panetta (D-CA-20), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR-3), Ed Case (D-HI-1), Kim Schrier (D-WA-8), Mark Pocan (D-WI-2), Derek Kilmer (D-WA-6), Jenniffer González-Colón (R-Puerto Rico), Salud Carbajal (D-CA-24), Marilyn Strickland (D-WA-10), Tony Cárdenas (D-CA-29), Rick Larsen (D-WA-2), Marc Veasey (D-TX-33), Nikema Williams (D-GA-5), Joseph Morelle (D-NY-25), Debbie Dingell (D-MI-12), Grace Meng (D-NY-6), Jason Crow (D-CO-6), David Cicilline (D-RI-1), J. Luis Correa (D-CA-46), Peter Welch (D-VT-At Large), Alma Adams (D-NC-12), Chellie Pingree (D-ME-1), Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA-11), Seth Moulton (D-MA-6), John Katko (R-NY-24), Mike Levin (D-CA-49), Dwight Evans (D-PA-3), Jackie Speier (D-CA-14), Jesús García (D-IL-4), Andy Kim (D-NJ-3), Ro Khanna (D-CA-17), Danny Davis (D-IL-7), Jahana Hayes (D-CT-5), Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD-2), Jimmy Gomez (D-CA-34), William Keating (D-MA-9), Chris Pappas (D-NH-1), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-9), Bobby Rush (D-IL-1), Anna Eshoo (D-CA-18), Melanie Stansbury (D-NM-1), Yvette Clarke (D-NY-9), Ami Bera (D-CA-7), Frederica Wilson (D-FL-24), Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-1), Alan Lowenthal (D-CA-47), Katie Porter (D-CA-45), Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE-At-large), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA-40), Lucy McBath (D-GA-6), Norma Torres (D-CA-35), James McGovern (D-MA-2), Thomas Suozzi (D-NY-3), Ann Kuster (D-NH-2), Al Lawson (D-FL-5), Ruben Gallego (D-AZ-7),

Conor Lamb (D-PA-17), Nanette Diaz Barragán (D-CA-44), Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-3), John Larson (D-CT-1), Judy Chu (D-CA-27), Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ-2), Lauren Underwood (D-IL-14), Marie Newman (D-IL-3), Eric Swalwell (D-CA-15), Madeleine Dean (D-PA-4), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH-9), Mark Takano (D-CA-41), Jim Cooper (D-TN-5), Daniel Kildee (D-MI-5), Grace Napolitano (D-CA-32), Juan Vargas (D-CA-51), Mary Gay Scanlon (D-PA-5), Frank Pallone (D-NJ-6), Betty McCollum (D-MN-4), Sara Jacobs (D-CA-53), and Stacey Plaskett (D-Virgin Islands-At-Large).