



# THE POLICY PAGE

An update on state and federal action from

## The Center for Public Policy Priorities

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### Food & Nutrition Update

- Child nutrition and WIC reauthorization bill passes Congress...
- Spending levels for nutrition programs for FY 99 decided in Omnibus Appropriations Act...
- Texas Association of Second Harvest Food Banks provides relief to flood victims

As members of the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress return home for midterm elections, anti-hunger advocates can celebrate several important advances made in federal nutrition programs. In a welcome move given the number of cuts to assistance programs over the last few years, Congress passed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act. The bill, transmitted to the President for his signature on October 20, includes some positive changes to child nutrition programs. HR 3874 increases access to child nutrition programs through expanded eligibility, streamlined service delivery, and increased funding. The bill also reauthorizes the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and makes several positive changes to WIC program requirements. Here is a brief look at the provisions in this legislation as well as an update on flood relief provided by food banks:

### HR 3874 - Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act

#### CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

*After School Programs.* The bill expands access to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) by allowing schools and community organizations that run after school programs to use federal food programs to serve snacks to children from Kindergarten through high school (age limit used to be 12). The bill also simplifies service delivery by allowing schools the option of using the NSLP instead of the CACFP to serve children up to age 18 in after school programs. HR 3874 also increases the funding available to programs in low-income areas by allowing any afterschool program in an area where 50% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals to receive the highest reimbursement rate and serve all children at the site for free. In areas that do not meet the 50% requirement, low-income children who qualify can receive free snacks using an individual means-test of family income. In these areas, the NSLP can serve children up to 18, while the age limit for CACFP providers is up age 12.

*Programs Serving Homeless Children.* The bill expanded the homeless Child Nutrition Program and Summer Food Service Homeless Program from a limited pilot into the CACFP. Now, homeless shelters can use the CACFP to serve meals and snacks to homeless children up to 12 years. Shelters will receive a full reimbursement for meals served without requiring a means test.

*Summer Food Programs.* Non-profit organizations that are Summer Food Service Program sites can now operate 25 sites (up from 20), regardless of whether the site is urban or rural. The bill also eliminates the limit on the total number of children that can be served by a non-profit.

*School Breakfast.* A partial victory, the bill authorizes school breakfast pilots but does not make them mandatory. Funding for these pilots will have to be made available through next year's appropriations process. Further study of the potential effects of offering school breakfast is also authorized.

#### WIC PROGRAM

*Income Documentation.* Applicants/participants will have to document their income. State agencies can waive requirement for applicants who don't have documentation or for whom documentation would be a barrier to participation (i.e., homeless, undocumented workers). This is not a significant change for Texas, where WIC agencies already exercise this flexibility. However, WIC advocates successfully preserved states' flexibility in this area by defeating a provision in an earlier version of the bill that would have required the Secretary of Agriculture to issue income verification regulations.

*Certification Requirement.* Applicants must be physically present at certification/recertification appointments. Local agencies can waive requirement 1) for children present at initial certification who are receiving ongoing health care, if their presence might endanger their health; 2) for children of women who work; 3) if it conflicts with ADA; and 4) if work is a barrier to compliance. A provision in an earlier version of the bill would have required infants to be certified for income eligibility every six months.

*\*Price of WIC Foods.* States must consider price of WIC foods as one criterion in selection of vendors and set up a system to prevent WIC vendors from raising prices.

*\*Purchase of Breast Pumps.* States can use food funds to purchase breast pumps.

*\*GAO Study.* The General Accounting Office will study the quality of and the cost of delivering WIC services.

*Information Sharing with CACFP Providers.* USDA must

provide WIC information to state agencies administering the CACFP program to inform CACFP parents about WIC. (This requirement had been eliminated under the welfare reform bill of 1996.)

\*National Association of WIC Directors (NAWD) legislative success.

## SCHOOL BREAKFAST...HOW TEXAS MEASURES UP

On the subject of school breakfast, the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) recently released its School Breakfast Scorecard. The report found that 96.7% of schools in Texas that offer school lunch now offer school breakfast, making Texas the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest ranking state in this category. However, less than half (47.4%) of the students in Texas who receive free & reduced price lunch also receive free and reduced-price breakfast. Texas ranks 12<sup>th</sup> in this category. Brownsville's Pace High School was honored in the report for its innovative "Breakfast in a Bag" program, which brings breakfast to kids in the classroom. Now, 90% of the students in the Brownsville ISD eat breakfast, and, since the program's debut, test scores in reading, writing, and math have also improved.

*For more information about the School Breakfast Scorecard, contact Michelle Tingling-Clemmons at FRAC at (202) 986-2200.*

## HR 4328 – 1999 OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Unable to resolve all of the 13 spending bills before adjourning for the year, the 105th Congress passed an omnibus appropriations bill that sets funding levels for programs for which regular appropriations measures had not been enacted, including funding for USDA programs. HR 4328 includes funding for the WIC program at \$3.924 (same as last year); \$15 million for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP); \$90 million in discretionary funds for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP); and \$5 million for the

Community Food and Nutrition Program. Although the WIC program was level-funded at last year's grant amount, participation rates in Texas will not be affected, and there is even some room for growth. WIC participation in Texas reached 700,000 in September, the highest number of participants ever, and the Texas Department of Health estimates it will be able to serve roughly 740,000 per month next year.

## FOOD BANKS PROVIDE CRITICAL, LONG-TERM RELIEF TO FLOOD VICTIMS

### ▪ *Texas Association of Second Harvest Food Banks (TASHFB) Organizes Flood Relief*

The Texas Association of Second Harvest Food Banks (TASHFB), an affiliate of Second Harvest, the largest charitable hunger relief organization in the U.S., coordinates the efforts of 19 food banks across Texas. In response to the recent floods, which have devastated parts of Texas and left thousands homeless, TASHFB and food bank staff are behind the scenes providing critical emergency food and organized support for needy Texans who are victims of the floods. Five food banks in the Texas Second Harvest network, the Capitol Area Food Bank in Austin, the San Antonio Food Bank, the Houston Food Bank, and the Community Food Bank of Victoria, are distributing food at no charge to local soup

kitchens and pantries and referring affected individuals to disaster relief agencies. Dara Austin, executive director of TASHFB, estimates that they have distributed ½ million pounds of food since the floods. Food banks are unique in that they provide critical, long-term relief in times of disaster, providing food on a daily basis to victims even after other relief agencies have pulled out.

*If you need more information or have a question about TASHFB's flood relief efforts, please call Dara Austin or Lori Kachner at 1-877-765-4333 for a referral in your area.*

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