

# Child Nutrition Reauthorization: Overview

## **Child hunger is a significant problem in the United States.**

Nearly 17 million American children struggle against hunger. While hunger affects people of all ages, it is particularly devastating for children. Even short-term episodes of hunger can cause lasting damage to child development, putting children at risk for a range of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical problems. Nearly one in four American children experience hunger each year and as a result is more likely to:

- Exhibit decreased attention and lower test scores;
- Display aggression, tardiness, and absenteeism; and,
- Become sick or hospitalized.

## **We have the tools to end child hunger in our country.**

Strengthening the child nutrition programs provides an immediate and direct way to reduce child hunger and improve health and educational outcomes. Programs like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); school breakfast and lunch programs; and preschool, summer and afterschool meal programs are vital in providing children the food they need for healthy development.

## **Unfortunately, child nutrition programs do not reach all children in need of food.**

Of the more than 19 million schoolchildren receiving food assistance at lunch, 10 million do not receive breakfast assistance and 17 million do not receive summer meals. Many eligible children lack access to programs or face other barriers to participation, whether because a program is not offered in their community, transportation is limited, or eligibility provisions lack coordination with other agencies. Child nutrition programs could do far more to reduce hunger simply by reaching more kids:

- There are 101,000 schools operating the National School Lunch Program, but only 87,000 operating the School Breakfast Program.
- Only 34,700 Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sites operate nationwide.
- Of the 19.4 million children receiving free or reduced-price lunches each school day, only 46 percent receive breakfast and just 11 percent receive summer food.

## **Child nutrition programs are only effective when they reach the children who need food. The top priority for Child Nutrition Reauthorization must be to increase program access and participation among eligible, low-income children.**

Congress is scheduled to reauthorize child nutrition programs in 2010. A strong reauthorization can provide millions of hungry children with the food they need and put us on track to achieving the President's goal of ending child hunger by 2015.

It is critical that Congress provide significant new investments for child nutrition programs, building upon the President's request for \$1 billion per year in new resources. Without adequate funding, authorizing committees will be unable to make necessary improvements to these programs, leaving millions of children without access to needed food.

Congress should invest new resources in policies that increase program access and participation so we can connect more eligible children with the food they need and reduce child hunger. Specifically, reauthorization should focus on closing the summer hunger gap and enrolling more eligible children in school breakfast and lunch.