

4/11 Subcommittee on Agriculture FY25 Appropriations Hearing

Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the importance of robust funding for the WIC program for Fiscal Year 2025. To ensure continued access to this crucial program, I am requesting the subcommittee provide \$7.75 billion for the program in FY 2025.

I am grateful for the significant and much needed increase in funding that the program received in Fiscal Year 2024, a reflection of the longstanding, bipartisan commitment to ensuring that every eligible individual who seeks WIC services can access its resources. This investment made sure we did not have to cut current women, infants, or children off the program or those put those most vulnerable on waitlists. This effort will save the government and our health care system money in the long run.

I grew up hungry. I often went without breakfast or lunch and would find myself eating leftovers off my friends' plates to get through the day. My experience is not unique. According to the Department of Agriculture, over 30 million households with children are food insecure.

WIC is the nation's premier and proven preventive public health nutrition program. By law, WIC is designed to supplement diets and provide nutrients for healthy growth and development and currently supports over 6 million low-income and nutritionally at-risk mothers and young children by providing nutritious foods education on healthy eating, and referrals to health care and related services. WIC participants experience reduced rates of childhood obesity, increased dietary quality and variety, higher immunization rates, and higher cognitive development scores. Participants also benefit from breastfeeding education and support – led by breastfeeding peer counselors, who are often members of the program themselves.

The WIC program's evidence-based food packages are available to participants according to their life stage nutritional needs. These food packages must be regularly updated to align with the latest science.

Just this week, the most recent updates to those food packages were finalized and it is critical that we let science, not politics, continue to guide the food packages.

One highlight of this update is the changes to encourage participants to eat more fruits and vegetables by increasing the cash-value benefit (CVB) amounts. In FY 2024, this benefit was targeted for cuts in this subcommittee, and I hope that this year, the subcommittee will fully fund this science-based recommendation.

On top of health benefits, WIC serves as a key economic driver, providing benefits to taxpayers and local communities. When a family makes a WIC purchase, it infuses cash in local communities and small businesses, strengthening local economies all over the country and supporting our farmers.

Now more than ever, it is necessary to strengthen our investment in WIC as we are now seeing enrollment steadily increase and the FY 2025 funding must acknowledge that reality. At the same time, we know that many eligible individuals are still not participating in WIC.

A budget reflects priorities and one of this subcommittee's priorities must be ensuring that more food insecure and nutritionally at-risk pregnant women, infants, and children are connected to the

needed nutrition and services that WIC provides. Because the country continues to deal with economic impacts of the pandemic, including rising inflation and higher food costs, increased costs must be met with increased funding. We cannot let women or children go hungry.

As a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, I know firsthand how important nutritious foods are for a baby's development.

Until we have a hunger free America, we will need a strong WIC. I know you have many choices and decisions to make for FY 2025. I encourage you to make the right one when it comes to WIC and properly fund this program and ensure access to a program that supports a healthy diet and proper nutrition that allows participants to thrive and reach their full potential. . Thank you once again for allowing me the time to speak on this important issue this morning. I appreciate your consideration of this request.