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United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

The Houston Food Bank is the nation's largest food bank distributing over 74 million meals last year through over 600 partner agencies in eighteen counties. Our Kids Cafe program, funded through the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program provides 4,000 hot meals a day to children in after school programs. Our Backpack Buddy program delivers over 10,000 backpacks of weekend food each week to school-aged children. At Houston Food Bank we lead the fight against hunger and protect our most vulnerable.

The proposed and amended H.R. 5003 *Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016* reauthorizes the Child Nutrition Act and has some troubling content. Below are three main points we would like to discuss and ask for your support.

- **Block Grant Pilot**

Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute Offered by Mr. Rokita of Indiana Section 9. Nutritional and other program requirements, page 100, line 23 (h) STATE ADMINISTRATION OF CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Allowing a three state block grant pilot endangers the future of a federally controlled child nutrition feeding program. This block grant will replace the School Breakfast, National School Lunch, Special Milk, and Team Nutrition programs. In addition the funding for these programs will be capped and cannot exceed the amount received in fiscal year 2016. This will limit funding for school breakfast and lunch and allow states to have broad control to:

- determine which children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals and formulate that eligibility
- decide the length of time of year that meals are provided
- abandon the current nutrition standards
- require that only one meal is accessible for children.

This language threatens the future of child nutrition programs.

- **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)**

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SEC. 105 Miscellaneous Provisions page 40 line 17

...For each school year beginning on or after July 1, 2017, the Secretary shall use a threshold that is not less than 60 percent...

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a federal option allowing schools in high poverty areas to receive free school breakfast and lunch for all students without individual applications. H.R. 5003 raises the CEP threshold from 40 percent to 60 percent. In Texas alone, this change now makes 2100 schools (235 Harris County) ineligible for the program where 522,660 children (87,089 Harris County) currently could receive free school breakfast and lunch.

Raising eligibility harms the children of the working poor, who may not qualify for federal assistance programs, yet remain food insecure.

- **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program**

SEC. 110 Fruit and Vegetable Program page 99 line 11

...Section 19 of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1769a) is amended in the heading, by striking "FRESH"

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program gives low-income children access to fresh produce snacks at targeted elementary schools at no cost. Exposure to fresh healthy foods is essential for setting life-long healthy eating habits. Removing the fresh from the program, while allowing schools more flexibility, defeats the very purpose of the program. Allowing schools to be reimbursed for items such as canned peach slices in syrup further perpetuates unhealthy eating behavior.

This change threatens the purpose and intent of this program.

- **WIC**

SEC. 206 Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children page 119 line 21

*Taken from the Senate Bill Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016
IN GENERAL A State may elect to certify participant children who have had their fifth birthday but have not yet attained their sixth birthday, during a period that ends on the earlier of (AA) the sixth birthday of the children; or (BB) when the children attend full day kindergarten.*

The language above is absent within the House Bill. Currently, children enrolled in the WIC program are ineligible after age 5. Many children do not begin school, where they would be eligible for free or reduced priced breakfast and lunch, until after their fifth birthday. Including this language in the bill would eliminate the year-long hunger gap, at an age where nutrition is vital for healthy development.

Five year old children cannot wait until kindergarten starts to eat well.

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We ask for you to oppose H.R. 5003 when it reaches the House floor. We appreciate the history and bipartisanship of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act and trust you will continue to fight for the children in your district.

Thank you for your consideration and for listening to our concerns. If we can be of any assistance to help you help lead the fight against hunger in your district, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

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