

Oppose the Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016 (H.R. 5003)

Congress is working to renew the law that funds child nutrition programs, including those for school meals, summer feeding, and the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) nutrition program for pregnant and new mothers along with their small children. These programs have kept millions of children from going hungry over the decades.

The Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016 was introduced by Rep. Todd Rokita (R-Ind.), chairman of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education. The bill renews child nutrition programs but also makes harmful changes that could deny tens of thousands of eligible children access to nutritious meals.

There are provisions of the act that cause particular concern for Bread for the World. These provisions would make it more difficult to connect hungry children with nutritious meals:

- *Substantially cutting the number of high-poverty schools that are eligible to implement community eligibility.* Under current law, high-poverty schools, group of schools, or a school district can use the community eligibility provision to serve meals to *all* students at no charge. At least 40 percent of the students must be identified as already qualifying for free school meals. The current provision allows more children to receive school meals while streamlining meal programs and reducing paperwork. H.R. 5003 would change the threshold allowing schools to implement community eligibility from 40 percent to 60 percent. This change would result in 7,000 high-poverty schools with more than 3 million children having to reinstate paper applications. Some students eligible for lunch and breakfast programs will lose access due to a burdensome application process, denying them the food they need to thrive.
- *Increasing school meal application verification requirements.* Requiring schools to verify more school meal applications could lead to more eligible children losing access to meals. The change would disproportionately impact vulnerable families, such as those who are homeless, migrant, or have limited English proficiency.
- *A school meal block grant demonstration project in three states.*



Joseph Moller/Bread for the World

Under the block grant, a state would opt to receive a set amount of funding in lieu of federal funding for school lunch and breakfast programs. Funding would be capped at the amount of federal dollars the state received for these programs in fiscal year 2016. States would have broad discretion in implementing school feeding programs and would not be subject to current laws or regulations around eligibility guidelines or nutrition standards. Block granting school meals would make the programs less responsive to sudden increases in need and puts children at risk of losing access to school meals.

Additionally, the bill fails to adequately close the summer hunger gap. For every six low-income children who receive a school lunch, only one also gets a meal during the summer months. While the bill provides some funding for summer electronic benefits transfer (providing a debit-like card with funds for families to purchase groceries on their own), it would have an extremely limited impact. Funding would be capped at \$10 million per year, less than half of what is currently spent on summer EBT pilot projects.

While the bill does include some modest improvements, including a 2-cent increase in school breakfast reimbursement rates, these improvements come at too great a cost. Our children deserve a bill that invests in their future, not one that makes it more difficult for hungry children to access nutritious meals.

**Any child nutrition bill must connect children who are hungry with the nutritious meals they need.
Actively oppose H.R. 5003.**