The upcoming stimulus/recovery legislative vehicles provide an important opportunity to meet children’s nutritional needs so that no child is hungry and all children have the nutrition they need to grow up healthy. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for and importance of strong nutrition policies that improve children’s access to healthy meals to address health disparities exacerbated by this crisis. The Biden-Harris plan includes several provisions that will be critical to combating food and nutrition insecurity in the United States. The upcoming stimulus/recovery package is an opportunity to build on this work by including a strong Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program for children, as well as an extension of the child nutrition waivers and policies that have ensured broad access to nutritious meals.

**Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)**
The P-EBT program has provided families with resources to purchase food to replace meals that they would have received through the child nutrition programs during normal times. The program is set to expire on September 30, 2021, and benefits cannot be provided during summer break, on weekends, or for school holidays. The upcoming stimulus/recovery packages offer the opportunity to extend and strengthen an EBT program for children that helps to ensure they have the nutrition they need when schools are closed. While the executive order for guidance to increase P-EBT benefits to include an additional snack is a critical need, there is much more that needs to be done to ensure access to good nutrition during the pandemic and beyond.

**Child Nutrition Waivers**
The nationwide child nutrition program waivers issued in 2020 have allowed the school meal programs to respond to the pandemic. Congress granted the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) this waiver authority through fiscal year 2021, but Congress should extend that waiver authority to allow the child nutrition programs to better meet the needs of struggling families through the next school year and beyond.

In addition, the waivers that allow schools and communities to offer meals at no charge through the Summer Nutrition Programs through June 30, 2021 highlight the importance and value of nutritious school meals for all. USDA should encourage schools to use the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program nutrition standards regardless of the program they operate. Schools should continue to document if they struggle to meet the standards due to COVID-19, and USDA must provide robust technical assistance to help schools address these challenges. By offering school meals at no charge and ensuring they remain nutritious, all children will be able to experience the health and academic benefits linked to participation in school meals. These waivers also ensure that schools have less administrative work and costs, and do not have to struggle with unpaid school meal fees. This approach should be extended to the next school year and beyond.

The health of students and their academic achievement are inextricably linked. College and career readiness and post-secondary academic success are associated with improved health and well-being as well as reduced risk for premature death, particularly among communities of color. Similarly, healthy students miss fewer days of school and are more able to learn, creating a feedback loop that can either position students to succeed or hold back their potential. We call upon the administration and Congress to include these provisions in the upcoming stimulus/recovery legislative vehicles to ensure that every child in this country receives the healthy food they need to learn and grow.

*The joint statement was developed by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), and the American Heart Association. FRAC facilitates the Child Nutrition Forum, a diverse group of national organizations that urges Congress to make critical investments and improvements in Child Nutrition programs through the reauthorization process. CSPI leads the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, the largest nutrition coalition.*