

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Thursday, May 14, 2009
Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairwoman McCarthy Statement Subcommittee Hearing On
“Improving Child Nutrition Programs to Reduce Childhood
Obesity”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), chairwoman of the Healthy Families and Communities, for a joint subcommittee hearing on “Improving Child Nutrition Programs to Reduce Childhood Obesity.”*

I'd like to welcome our witnesses to this hearing on how we can reduce childhood obesity through the child nutrition reauthorization.

As a nurse for over 30 years, I have seen firsthand the risks and illnesses that can result from obesity.

In the last several months, I have read the studies that one in five four-year-olds are obese, that kids have the arteries of middle aged adults, and that the number of children who take medication for chronic diseases has jumped dramatically.

In March, a study was released which indicated that the proximity to fast food is a factor in student obesity.

Some of these reports are shocking, and unfortunately, some are not.

Childhood obesity, diabetes and heart disease are all on the rise in the US and one of the best tools we have to combat these illnesses is our ability to provide wholesome and healthy nutrition to children in school.

Childhood obesity is found in all 50 States, in both young children and adolescents, affecting all social and economic levels.

Low income communities tend to have the highest obesity rates due to factors such as a lack of access to affordable, healthy foods, lack of safe, available venues for physical activity, and a lack of education about nutrition and its benefits.

Furthermore, it has been found that minority children are at the greatest risk for obesity.

There is no silver bullet to solve childhood obesity.

However, the School Breakfast and Lunch programs can make a great impact because they may provide more than 50 percent of a student's food and nutrient intake on school days.

The decisions we make during reauthorization are very important to a great number of children, and that is why we have assembled such a knowledgeable panel.

We are here today to explore how we can reduce obesity through the child nutrition reauthorization.

There is a wealth of information available on the issue of reducing obesity and in my mind it comes down to two things: healthy eating and physical activity.

These sound simple, but families all over the nation know it is far from simple.

Given the current harsh financial realities for many families in my district and throughout the nation, schools have an increasingly important role to play in providing children with nutritious food during their days.

I also hear from folks in schools finding it more and more difficult to meet the increased demand for meals with healthy, nutritious and high-quality foods, without adequate funding.

We also know how critical it is to reach the youngest children and infants as soon as possible.

I hear from constituents all the time how important the WIC programs are to help families transition from poor eating habits to healthy ones.

This is particularly important because WIC is working with the youngest of children.

As we will hear about today, the Institute of Medicine has undertaken a study to review and provide recommendations to update the nutrition and meal standards for school nutrition programs.

School meal standards are critical and I appreciate Dr. Stallings being here to discuss her work.

Of course, children aren't just eating school meals when they are at school.

Foods in vending machines and less healthy a la carte items in the cafeteria are readily available.

And while in school, many children are subjected to junk-food advertising.

The students are a captive audience, and advertisers have proven to be remarkably effective at influencing their target customers.

Rep. Woolsey has done a lot of work in this area and I am looking forward to her testimony regarding issues surrounding competitive foods.

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, in addition to healthy food, physical activity is the other critical element in reducing obesity.

We know that change for adults is hard, but if we start to educate our kids early enough, we can establish lifelong habits and the values of healthy living and wellness for the future.

We also know that studies show children who are physically active learn better.

We will hear testimony today about some terrific innovative programs schools are using to address obesity.

We have our work cut out for us.

But by taking a comprehensive approach to nutrition, our children, families and communities will all be healthier.

Thank you all for being here and I look forward to your testimony.

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