



## Hispanic Education Coalition

May 19, 2004

Senator Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Senate Agriculture Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Tom Harkin  
Ranking Member  
Senate Agriculture Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Harkin:

On behalf of the Hispanic Education Coalition (HEC), an *ad hoc* coalition of national organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities for more than 40 million Hispanics living in the United States and Puerto Rico, we write to thank the Committee for working in a bipartisan manner to draft the "Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004." This proposal to renew the child nutrition programs is of critical importance to Latinos, who often depend on them for access to nutritious meals and information about healthy diet and lifestyle.

The HEC strongly supports this legislation because it balances program integrity issues with much-needed improvements for Latino children. Specifically, we applaud efforts to safeguard access for vulnerable populations and prevent Latino childhood obesity. Research has shown that children from farmworking families experience high rates of hunger. A recent Wake Forest University study found that nearly half of farmworking families in North Carolina could not afford enough food for their families. In addition, over the last decade, the USDA has documented a disparate impact on less literate and limited-English-proficient (LEP) households' ability to enroll in and maintain eligibility for child nutrition programs. This legislation addresses these issues by making it easier for migrant children to begin receiving school meals as soon as they enter a new school. It also sets standards for communications with LEP families when they are seeking to participate in the child nutrition programs.

In addition, obesity is a growing problem for all Americans, particularly Latinos. Approximately 22% of Latino children are overweight. Moreover, recent reports have indicated that factors such as being overweight, poor diet, and low physical activity play a role in the higher rates of type 2 diabetes among Hispanic children. This legislation authorizes pilot programs aimed at preventing Latino childhood obesity and promoting sound nutrition choices. These efforts will be targeted to communities in greatest need of these services. Moreover, findings from these programs will help identify effective strategies and approaches for delivering information on childhood obesity prevention to Latinos throughout the nation.

The "Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004" takes an important step forward in ensuring that all children benefit from healthy meals and nutrition education efforts. Moreover, it is clear that the Senate Agriculture Committee made Hispanic and migrant children a priority in this reauthorization. The HEC will be sure to communicate this to our constituencies. We believe the work of this Committee demonstrates that Congress can work in a bipartisan manner to address the needs of the Latino community. We hope that the Congress extends this bipartisan spirit to other important Latino priorities.

Sincerely,

Melissa Lazarin, HEC Co-chair  
National Council of La Raza

Manda Lopez, HEC Co-chair  
National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association

