

May 17, 2005

Assembly Member John Laird  
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee  
State Capitol, Room 6026  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Wesley Chesbro  
Chair, Senate Budget Committee  
State Capitol, Room 5035  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support for School Breakfast Funding: Accept May Revision Provision**

Dear Assembly Member Laird & Senator Chesbro:

The consequences of obesity and overweight—including shorter life-spans for children, higher incidences of diabetes, cancer and heart disease and a \$22 billion price tag for our state—threaten the health and economic well-being of California. Yet, unlike many public health problems, research has uncovered clear steps that will help our state respond to this crisis. Given the severity of this epidemic, California has a moral and financial responsibility to invest in programs we know will work.

Eating breakfast and consuming more fruits and vegetables are two such strategies. Research shows that children who skip breakfast are more likely to be overweight than kids who don't. Yet nationwide 85% of teenagers don't eat breakfast. Similarly, diets rich in fruits and vegetables are known to help prevent obesity. However, only 30% of California teens meet the "5-A-Day" goal.

Fortunately, the School Breakfast Program provides California schools with a vehicle to address both of these problems. Funded by a mix of federal, state and local dollars, the School Breakfast Program has proven success in improving children's test scores and classroom behavior. With baseline USDA standards in place, this program also delivers a healthy meal to participating students who may otherwise not get the nutrition they need to learn and grow.

Despite its potential, in California, the School Breakfast Program remains an underutilized resource. Not only is participation low (only 40% of low-income children and 16% of all children participate), but the menu does not yet reflect the latest nutrition science. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the new food pyramid recommend increasing fruit and vegetable consumption even above the "5-A-Day" and they emphasize the benefits of whole fruit instead of juice.

Governor Schwarzenegger's May Revise includes a provision for \$18.2 million to put this knowledge into practice. The details of the proposal reflect sound budget policy:

- First, the funding comes from Proposition 98, reflecting the research-proven role the School Breakfast Program plays in supporting educational goals.
- Second, the proposal is designed as a one-year program, reflecting the fact that the funding would be used not only to pay for the fruit itself, but also for capital improvements such as refrigerators, salad bars (for serving fruit) and other infrastructure. Also, a subset of the funds (\$1 million) would be targeted to help districts that don't yet have a breakfast program, increasing the number of California students who have access to this important nutrition and helping our state draw down untapped federal nutrition dollars.
- Finally, the Governor's proposal calls for evaluating the program, which will yield information to help tailor any future policy recommendations for increasing fruit in breakfast.

I hope you will join me in supporting the Governor's call for a reasonable and timely investment in evidence-based strategies to improve student nutrition.

Sincerely,