



August 17, 2022

Dear Members of Congress,

We write to you as members of Mission: Readiness, an organization of nearly 800 retired admirals and generals who recognize that the strength of our country depends on a strong military.

This strength is being challenged, as according to the Department of Defense, 71 percent of today's young adults ages 17 to 24 cannot qualify for military service because they are not academically prepared, are too overweight, or have a record of crime or drug abuse.

Data has shown obesity disqualifies approximately one-third of young Americans from service in the U.S. Armed Forces. Furthermore, studies have shown that obesity is on the rise, with rates for 2- to 19-year-olds reaching 22 percent as of August 2020. This is an urgent matter of national security.

Federal nutrition programs have long been a part of America's security strategy. Following World War II, Congress established the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in response to high malnutrition amongst recruits. Since then, programs like NSLP, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), have garnered widespread support as they have improved nutrition for children by strengthening access to and consumption of fresh and nutritious foods.

We applaud the work Congress has done to strengthen these programs over the years. Since implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act twelve years ago, studies have found that child nutrition programs improved diet quality and academic performance for children in low-income and food-insecure households. We also know how crucial programs like WIC are at setting infants and toddlers on the right course for a healthy and successful life.

We must build upon this progress as the factors fueling the military ineligibility challenge carry broader implications. Every sector of our economy is actively competing for the approximate one-quarter of 17- to 24-year-olds who are healthy, well educated, and have a clean record. America is poised to significantly benefit if we advance programs that help prepare more youth to be able to serve their nation in any way they choose.

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Congress's overwhelming bipartisan passage of the Keep Kids Fed Act of 2022 shows that there is strong, bipartisan support for efforts to improve child nutrition. **We urge Congress to pass a bipartisan Child Nutrition Reauthorization before the end of this calendar year that prioritizes:**

- **Expanding and adapting school and summer meal programs** to reach all children experiencing food insecurity and who struggle to access healthy food.
- **Making permanent pandemic-era adaptations**, such as expanded delivery options, to ensure children have access to fresh foods no matter the circumstances.
- **Modernizing WIC** by expanding age eligibility and expanding and streamlining enrollment to allow all eligible children and families to participate.
- **Supporting school meal infrastructure to improve healthy food options.**

To support military readiness, we urge Congress to pass a bipartisan Child Nutrition Reauthorization this year and modernize America's nutrition programs. Together, we can help prepare our children for bright futures and strengthen our national security in the process.

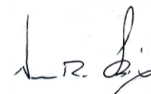
Very respectfully,



Mark P. Hertling
Lieutenant General
U.S. Army, Retired



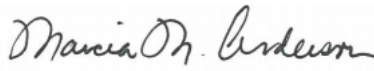
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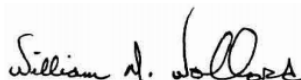
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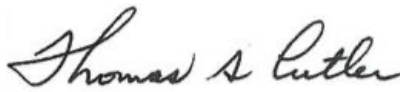
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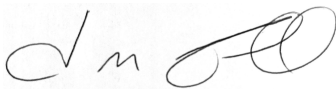
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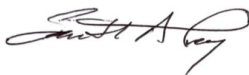
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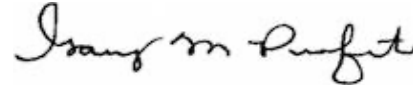
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