



September 16, 2026

**The Honorable Russell T. Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503**

Re: Release Section 32 Funds to Address the Financial Crisis in School Meal Programs

Dear Director Vought:

On behalf of School Nutrition Association (SNA) members and 30 million students who rely on school meals each day, **I urge you to work with federal leaders to release available funds to address the financial crisis facing school meal programs.**

We are grateful for this Administration's focus on healthy school meals, and our members are committed to building on their success. However, federal reimbursements fail to cover the rising cost of preparing meals to meet *current* school nutrition standards. The enclosed petition, signed by over 3,500 school nutrition professionals from across the country, details how financial pressures continue to build in the form of higher food, fuel and labor costs.

An [SNA survey](#) revealed more than half of school nutrition directors report “serious concern” about the financial sustainability of their programs. **Two new USDA studies confirm this growing funding shortfall:**

- A [September 2026 report](#) found that meal revenues (federal reimbursements, paid meals, and a la carte sales) covered an average of only 81 percent of program expenses.
- A [July 2026 report](#) revealed 35 percent of programs operated at a deficit at the end of SY 2023-24, up from 18 percent in SY 2021–22.
- As the Administration urges state Governors to sign the Pledge for Healthier School Meals, [USDA warns](#) that “a challenging and uncertain budgeting environment threatens to pressure [Food Service Directors] toward more heat-and-serve meals.”

We respectfully ask that you urge USDA to utilize Section 32 (7 U.S.C. § 612c) funds to provide emergency per-meal support to school food authorities.

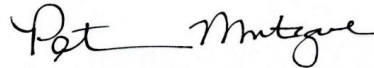
As you know, Section 32 is a permanent appropriation established to strengthen agricultural markets and child nutrition programs; its unobligated balances of tariff funds carry forward from year to year. **We ask that, rather than rescinding anticipated balances for Fiscal Year 2027, those balances be put to work in school cafeterias.** This would direct USDA monies already appropriated, rather than create new budget authority. We request your help to direct the release of funds created by Congress for such extraordinary times, through the range of authorities available to the Administration.

As we make this plea to you, we understand a proposed USDA rule aligning school meal standards with the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans is still under thoughtful review at your agency. Many of the likely changes, such as more protein and whole grains at the center of the plate, will raise per-meal food costs, increase labor hours and require equipment investments. Without corresponding resources, schools may be forced to reduce menu variety, scale back scratch-cooked options, or raise paid meal prices for working families. Our members stand ready to meet with you and share their financial challenges and documentation in person.

Sincerely,



Ashley Powell, PhD, RD, SNS, FAND
President



Patricia Montague, FASAE, CAE
Chief Executive Officer

Enclosure: Petition to Federal Leaders — 3,572 signatories

cc: Hon. Brooke L. Rollins, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Hon. John Thune, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate; Hon. Charles E. Schumer, Minority Leader, U.S. Senate; Hon. Mike Johnson, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives; Hon. Hakeem Jeffries, Democratic Leader, U.S. House of Representatives; Hon. John Boozman, Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; Hon. Amy Klobuchar, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; Hon. Tim Walberg, Chairman, House Committee on Education and the Workforce; Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, Ranking Member, House Committee on Education and the Workforce; Hon. Glenn "GT" Thompson, Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture; Hon. Angie Craig, Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture; Hon. Susan M. Collins, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Hon. Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Hon. John Hoeven, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; Hon. Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; Hon. Tom Cole, Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations; Hon. Rosa L. DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations; Hon. Andy Harris, Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; Hon. Sanford D. Bishop, Jr., Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies