

October 15, 2026

The Honorable Russell Vought

Director

Office of Management and Budget

Washington, DC 20503

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins

Secretary

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Washington, DC 20250

Dear Director Vought and Secretary Rollins:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing school nutrition professionals, educators, anti-hunger advocates, health organizations, child-serving nonprofits, and food and agriculture stakeholders across America, we urge the Administration to make available balances of Section 32 of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1935 (7 U.S.C. § 612c) funds transferred to FNA Child Nutrition accounts to provide emergency financial relief for school meal programs nationwide.

America's school meal programs are facing a growing financial crisis. Rising food, labor, transportation, equipment, packaging, and operating costs have significantly outpaced federal reimbursement rates, leaving many school districts struggling to sustain programs that serve millions of children every day. The urgent need for financial relief is further underscored by the Administration's anticipated school meal standards proposed rule, which has been designated as an economically significant regulatory action. While stakeholders continue to evaluate the potential operational and financial implications of future requirements, many school meal programs are already operating under severe fiscal constraints and need these funds to be released now to face this crisis.

The U.S Department of Agriculture's (USDA) own [studies](#) confirm the depth of the funding shortfall. Meal revenues, including federal reimbursements, paid meal revenue, and a la carte sales, covered an average of only 81 percent of program expenses. In addition, 35 percent of school meal programs operated at a deficit at the end of School Year 2023-24, nearly double the 18 percent reported two school years earlier. These findings reflect conditions before the impact of direct certification decline, and the full effect of current economic pressures, including continued volatility in food, fuel, labor, transportation, and supply costs. The financial outlook for school meal programs is even more challenging today.

School nutrition professionals have responded with creativity and determination. They have streamlined operations, adjusted menus, pursued cost-saving measures, and maximized available resources. Yet despite these efforts, many programs continue to face an affordability crisis with depleted reserves and face difficult choices about program operations. Secretary Rollins recently acknowledged the challenges for school kitchens across the country in remarks at the MAHA Summit. Without additional support, schools may be forced to increase paid meal prices for families, delay equipment replacements, reduce menu variety, or divert educational resources to subsidize meal service operations.

School meals remain one of our nation's most effective investments in child health, academic achievement, as well as farm and food security. Millions of children rely on school breakfast and lunch as dependable sources of nutrition that support learning, attendance, and long-term well-being. Ensuring the financial sustainability of school meal programs is essential to supporting America's children and the communities where they thrive and grow.

Section 32 funds provide a practical, immediate, and fiscally responsible opportunity to help address this crisis. Congress intended Section 32 funds to be used to bolster "child nutrition programs". These funds have now been transferred to USDA and the Secretary has the discretion to use them. Releasing them this fall could provide meaningful relief to school meal programs facing funding challenges now without requiring new budget authority from Congress. Utilizing Section 32 balances to provide temporary assistance would help stabilize school meal programs now, strengthen their ability to address current and rising costs, and better position schools to prepare for future program requirements.

Accordingly, we respectfully urge you to work together with the Administration to:

1. Utilize Section 32 balances to provide emergency financial assistance for school meal programs.
2. Ensure schools have sufficient resources to maintain access to nutritious meals for students while preparing for future regulatory requirements.

In every community across this country, school nutrition programs are a cornerstone of child nutrition in America, yet many are operating on increasingly unstable financial footing. Timely action to make Section 32 resources available would provide immediate relief, help protect student access to healthy meals, and demonstrate the Administration's commitment to supporting schools, families, and children during a period of extraordinary financial pressure.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your continued commitment to the health and well-being of America's children.

Sincerely,

School Nutrition Association

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

American Heart Association

Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)

Chef Ann Foundation

Food Research & Action Center

FoodCorps

National Education Association

National Farm to School Network

National PTA

Share Our Strength

Urban School Food Alliance