

July 13, 2016

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the American Heart Association, the American Stroke Association, and its more than 30 million volunteers, I am writing to express our support for S. 3136 the Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016. This bipartisan bill strikes a reasonable balance between all interested parties while keeping nutrition standards and other programs strong and ultimately, protecting children's health. Moreover, it builds on the progress that we have made over the last several years.

While we strongly supported the original science-based nutrition standards for school meals, this bill reflects a common-sense compromise on sodium and whole grains standards. It allows schools that may have challenges with these particular nutrients more time and flexibility to meet the nutrition standards, while keeping the integrity of healthy school meals intact. This bill also makes kids' health a priority in many other ways. For example, it maintains the competitive foods standards and Community Eligibility Provision, and includes training and technical assistance, nutrition education programs, funding for school kitchen equipment, and funding for farm-to-school programs.

The policies in the bill takes direct aim at addressing the alarming health statistics facing

healthy nutrition standards are estimated to decrease the number of childhood obesity cases by more than two million and lead to a cost savings of \$800 million.

Over the past few years, my staff has talked to more than 800 school food service staff, parents, teachers, and perhaps most important, the kids. What they found were innovative, dedicated staff, children who love eating healthy, and parents who are confident that the food their children get in school is nutritious. They do not want to see the clock turned back to the days when Congress designated pizza as a vegetable.

I visited an elementary school near our headquarters in Dallas, Texas, and the school nutrition program was amazing – and the food was delicious. The children couldn't get enough fruits and vegetables; the meal met the moderate amounts of sodium and whole grain requirements; and the parents and teachers were engaged in a comprehensive healthy school environment. Coupled with farm-to-school and a school garden, the