

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 5, 2024

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries,

We write to highlight the urgent funding shortfall facing the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) that poses a significant and immediate risk to vulnerable young children and pregnant and postpartum women. We urge you to ensure any final appropriations package fully funds the WIC program for fiscal year 2024 (FY24) in order to avert disastrous participation or benefit cuts.

WIC is a vital lifeline for millions of vulnerable American families. It provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, health care referrals, and other important services to nearly 7 million low-income pregnant and postpartum participants, infants, and young children nationwide.¹ For more than 25 years, there has been a bipartisan commitment to provide adequate funding for WIC to serve every eligible family that relies on the program and to ensure that those in need are not turned away. At the foundation of this commitment is substantial evidence of WIC's positive impacts on the health and development of its participants.

Higher-than-expected program participation and rising food costs mean WIC funding levels proposed in both the House and Senate annual appropriations bills fall far short of what is needed for FY24. In recognition of the urgency of this shortfall, the Biden Administration has requested Congress provide \$1.4 billion in emergency funding for WIC.² If Congress fails to act and continues WIC's current funding level for the rest of the fiscal year, approximately 2 million pregnant and postpartum women and young children would be turned away from the program by September 2024— an inexcusable outcome.³

¹ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/09/01/wic-cuts-congress-budget-shutdown/>

³ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/about-2-million-parents-and-young-children-could-be-turned-away-from-wic>

If Congress fails to fully fund WIC, states will soon be forced to start turning eligible families away. Eligible applicants and current participants, primarily postpartum women who are not breastfeeding and children, could be put on waiting lists— leaving them without the services they rely on indefinitely. There are more than half a million current WIC participants who are pregnant and will need to renew their benefits shortly after giving birth.⁴ Under a funding shortfall, some of these new mothers could see their benefits halted. These new moms would lose access to WIC's nutritious foods at a time that is critical for their health and their child's development. Such devastating outcomes would disproportionately impact people of color, who are already at higher risk for severe pregnancy-related health issues including maternal mortality.

But even if states can, to some degree, avoid waiting lists, many participants would still be harmed by a shortfall. States are expected to reduce outreach, limit clinic hours, and leave staff vacancies unfilled to reduce spending, which are measures that impact *all* potentially eligible people. Additionally, once word gets out that states cannot serve certain applicants, people who are more medically at-risk and would be prioritized for participation⁵ may mistakenly believe that they would be denied benefits and decide not to apply. We also know that any cuts to specific WIC services, particularly the evidence-based fruit and vegetable incentives program, would undermine the program's effectiveness. We urge you to reject any proposal that eliminates or cuts fruit and vegetable vouchers, or any other WIC service.

America's maternal health crisis is growing worse by the day, and further disruption to WIC in the coming months would be catastrophic. As you work to finalize a government funding package, we urge you to fully fund WIC and protect vulnerable women and children from losing access to the vital support that WIC provides. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

⁴ <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/looming-wic-funding-shortfall-would-jeopardize-access-to-wics-proven-benefits-and>

⁵ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-eligibility-priority-system>



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



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Sydney Kamlager-Dove
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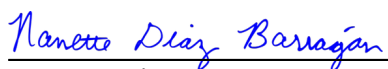
Susie Lee
Member of Congress



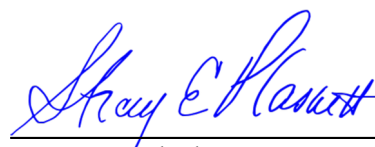
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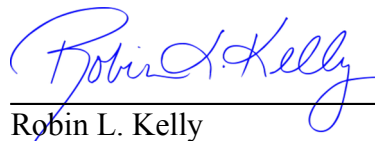
Nikema Williams
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Val Hoyle
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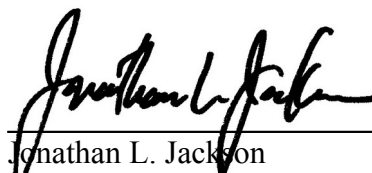
Jim Tokuda
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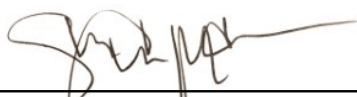
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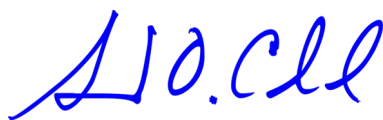
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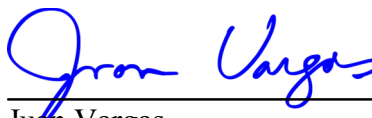
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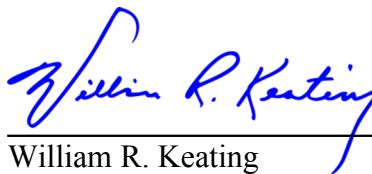
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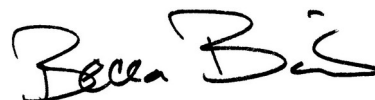
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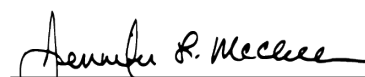
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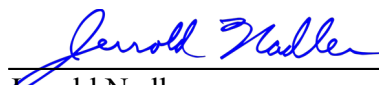
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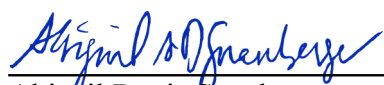
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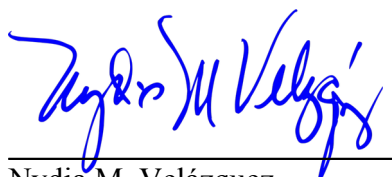
Linda T. Sánchez
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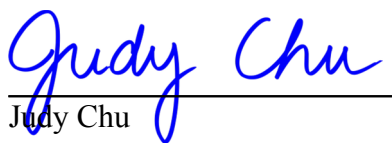
Jeanne Shaheen
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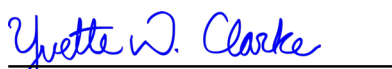
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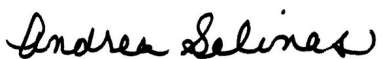
Marcy Kaptur
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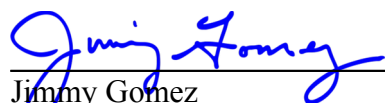
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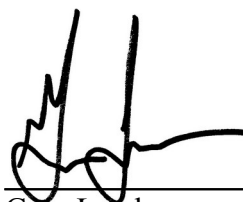
Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



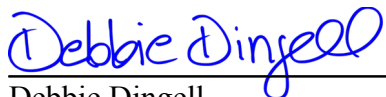
Jimmy Gomez
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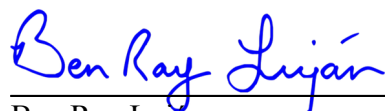
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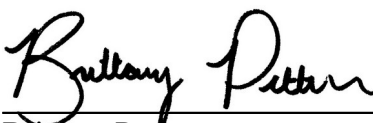
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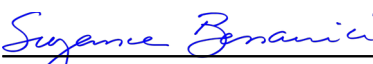
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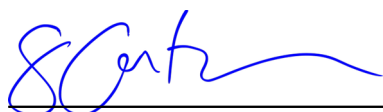
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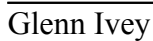
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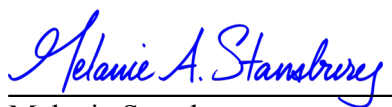
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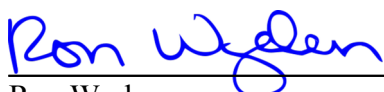
Bonnie Watson Coleman
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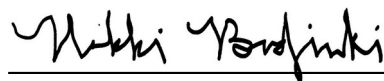
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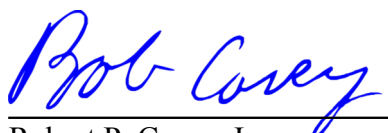
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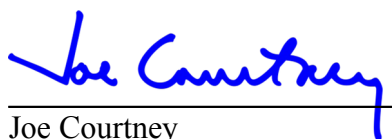
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Adriano Espaillat
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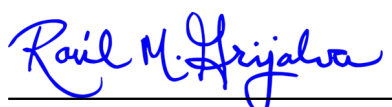
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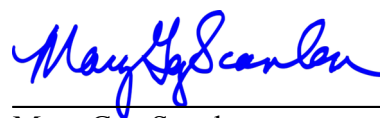
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Mike Thompson
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Bernard Sanders
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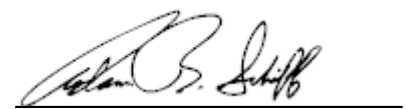
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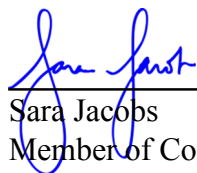
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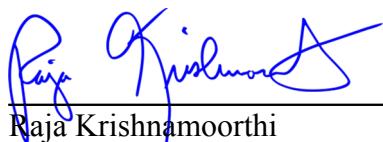
Norma J. Torres
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Sara Jacobs
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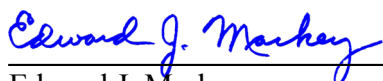
Cori Bush
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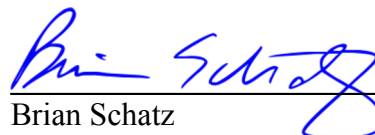
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United States Senator



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Jared Moskowitz
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Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



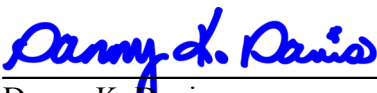
Al Green
Member of Congress
Scion of the Enslaved
Africans -
Sacrificed to Make America
Great



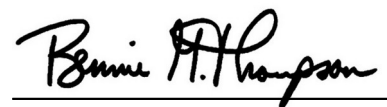
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



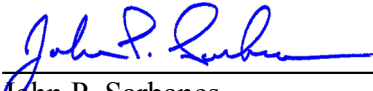
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Chris Deluzio
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CC:

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Susan Collins, Vice Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Kay Granger, Chairwoman, House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations