

May 21, 2009

Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Jack Kingston
2368 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Kingston:

We, the undersigned members of the Florida delegation, ask that the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee add Florida to the ten other states (Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Vermont) that are currently operating the Afterschool Meal Program.

The Afterschool Meal Program provides USDA reimbursements for meals served to children age 18 and under who participate in afterschool programs located in low-income areas in only ten states. All other states, including Florida, receive funding for afterschool snacks, but not meals, for children over age 13. Afterschool snacks are simply insufficient to meet the nutritional needs of our young people. A nutritious, evening meal is not always a given for many Florida families, and one in six Florida children are projected to struggle with hunger. The Afterschool Meal Program will help reduce hunger among Florida's children, while providing much-needed support for parents working non-traditional hours.

Florida's families will have a particular and immediate need for the program. Over the last year, the state has added more than 408,835 new recipients to food stamp roles — a 29 percent increase. At the end of last year, Florida led the nation for this dramatic growth, which represented the largest jump in the state's history, surpassing even the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew. Call volume at Florida's food stamp call centers was over 3 million for the month of October 2008—a 40 percent increase over the previous year. Many of these callers are first-time applicants who have lost their jobs during this recession.

As one would expect, other key indicators are on the rise that lead us to believe that these statistics do not fully encompass Florida's needs. Florida's unemployment rate is already higher than the national average and even with economic recovery expected to begin in 2010, the Congressional Budget Office projects higher unemployment rates for the next few years. It is widely known that Florida is one of the handful of states hit most dramatically by the housing downturn and the subsequent construction slow-down. Some parents are working two jobs now or odd hours just to maintain household budgets, and that can leave children at risk.

There are a number of precedents for adding Florida through the appropriations process. The Afterschool Meal Program has consistently grown since its authorization in 2000. It initially included in six states and since then, four states have been authorized to operate the program through the appropriations process – Illinois in FY2002; West Virginia in FY2008; and Maryland and Vermont in FY2009.

With the current state of Florida's economy, now is the perfect time to add Florida to this list. We urge you to support low-income families by adding Florida to the FY 2010 Agriculture Appropriations bill so agencies in Florida can respond to growing need.

Sincerely,

Representative Allen Boyd
Representative Corrine Brown
Representative Kathy Castor
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart
Representative Alan Grayson
Representative Alcee Hastings
Representative Ron Klein
Representative Susan Kosmas
Representative Kendrick Meek
Representative Adam Putnam
Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Representative Robert Wexler