



**OFFICE OF SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND  
OFFICE OF SPEAKER CHRISTINE C. QUINN**

**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

*August 12, 2009*

Contact:

Glen Caplin (Gillibrand) 917-865-7556  
Anthony Hoglebe (Quinn) 212-788-7157

**GILLIBRAND AND QUINN: “NYC CHILDREN GETTING SHORT-CHANGED  
ON HEALTHY MEALS”**

*Current Federal Regulations Ignore High Cost of Living in New York City*

*Senator Gillibrand, Speaker Quinn Unveil Legislative Plan to Improve Child Nutrition and  
Combat Obesity - Congress Set to Debate Future of Child Nutrition This Fall*

*Senator Gillibrand Introducing Legislation That Would Provide Free School Meals to 66,000  
Additional NYC School Children*

*New York, NY* – With the new school year set to start in less than one month, U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn today launched a joint effort to improve child nutrition in New York, and across the country. Joined by a coalition of government leaders and child nutrition advocates, including Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, State Senator Tom Duane, and State Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh, the lawmakers outlined a five point plan to overhaul the Child Nutrition Act and help schools provide more nutritious food.

To kick off this initiative, Senator Gillibrand will introduce the *Lowering Urban Nutrition Costs for Healthy Eating at Schools (LUNCHES) Act*, federal legislation to ensure that more children in high cost areas like New York City have access to free and nutritious school meals. In addition, the City Council is organizing a coalition of urban leaders from around the country to lobby Congress for five key improvements to the Child Nutrition Act. Los Angeles and Philadelphia have already signed on, with many more expected in the coming days. Speaker Quinn will also introduce a resolution later this month in support of the plan.

“As Congress debates how to improve health care access and lower health care costs, we must also pursue a strategy to tackle childhood obesity and improve the health of our future generations,” said **Senator Kirsten Gillibrand**. “If our children are going to have the

opportunity to reach their potential, they need a healthy start. I will fight to overhaul child nutrition standards in Congress and make sure New York City schools get the resources they need to give our children access to fresh fruits and vegetables.”

“New York City families have been hit hard by the recession, and now more than ever we need to make sure our children have access to healthy meals,” said **Speaker Christine C. Quinn**. “The City Council has been working with the Bloomberg Administration to fight two of the biggest challenges facing our city – hunger and obesity. I’m proud to now be partnering with Senator Gillibrand, and leaders from around the country, on this package of common sense changes to the Child Nutrition Act. By making a few key improvements, we’ll be able to provide free meals to tens of thousands of additional students. We can make it easier for children, infants, and pregnant mothers to enroll in meal programs, and improve the nutrition level of food we serve in our schools.”

This fall, Congress is set to debate the future of school lunch programs across the country as they vote on reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. New York City has much to gain, or lose, as a result of changes to the Child Nutrition Act when it is reauthorized by Congress this fall. The City is the largest customer of school lunches in the nation, and since the beginning of the recession, many more New Yorkers have experienced difficulty feeding their families. Even at the onset of the recession, studies indicated that 1.3 million New Yorkers lived in food insecure households.

Meanwhile, child obesity has skyrocketed in the last 40 years. More than 1 in 5 kindergarteners in New York City now fit the definition of obese, and the problem only gets worse as children get older. Nearly half of the City's elementary school students are either overweight or obese, and nearly 17 percent of all children are obese.

Obesity puts our children at risk of developing serious diseases – such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and depression. And studies show that being overweight or obese can have a negative impact on math and reading scores – and keep students out of school for more sick days.

New York City has made great improvements to health and nutrition among the city’s children. The City Council and the Bloomberg Administration have expanded enrollment in school meals, and significantly increased the nutrition level of food served by the City. But these efforts have always been limited by federal funding and regulations; and amendments to the Child Nutrition Act are critical to continued improvements.

“The Bloomberg administration has implemented an ambitious and innovative food policy agenda focusing on making our school meals program strong and bringing nutritious and affordable food to communities that have limited financial resources and high rates of diabetes and obesity,” said **Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda Gibbs**. “By offering students free breakfasts in their first class of the day, they can start the school day with a full stomach and a ready mind. We’ve improved technology so that through ACCESS NYC, parents can enroll kids for school meals online and we’ve implemented healthier standards for the meals the City itself serves. We are proud to work in partnership with Speaker Quinn and Senator

Gillibrand to advocate for a strong child nutrition bill that can build upon New York City’s success.”

“Hunger and obesity are twin crises facing New York City children,” said **Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer**. “School food, WIC, and other child nutrition programs are extraordinary opportunities to ensure that all children are healthy and able to excel in school, regardless of their family’s income level. Passing a much stronger Child Nutrition Act is a once in a five-year opportunity that we can not overlook.”

“The New York City Alliance for Child Nutrition Reauthorization is grateful that the City Council and Senator Gillibrand are taking steps to address childhood hunger and poor nutrition – problems that too many New Yorkers face,” said **Jilly Stephens, Executive Director of City Harvest**. “These priorities would improve federal child nutrition programs by making sure more children are eligible and providing the resources for schools to provide healthy meals.”

### ***LUNCHES ACT* / EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY AND STREAMLINING ENROLLMENT**

Currently, children at schools across the nation are all held to the same eligibility standard – those living at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty line or \$28,665 for a family of four. However, in high cost areas, like New York City, the federal poverty line does not accurately reflect the high cost of living, which leaves many of New York’s neediest children without access to the nutritious school meals they need.

The *LUNCHES Act* would address the inequity under the expiring bill, which puts New York City children at a huge disadvantage in qualifying for free and nutritious school meal programs. For those children who live in high cost areas, the *LUNCHES Act* would expand free meals to all children living under 185 percent of the federal poverty line or \$40,792 for a family of four.

High cost areas will be determined on a county-by-county basis. Any county in which the fair market rent is above the national average will be deemed high cost. This will provide an additional 66,000 children in New York City alone with free lunches.

The *LUNCHES Act* would work with the *Hunger Free Schools Act* to streamline enrollment and expand access to free meals for needy children. The current system for determining eligibility and enrollment in reduced price or free school meals is outdated, creating an unnecessary administrative burden on schools that are already short-staffed. To streamline this process, the *Hunger Free Schools Act*, will allow schools to automatically enroll children who are in SCHIP or Medicaid for free meals. It also allows schools to get reimbursed based on data that is already available instead of collecting individual paper forms, which can be costly and inefficient. With this streamlined process, more schools will be able to afford to provide free meals to more children.

The other components of Gillibrand and Quinn’s five point plan to improve childhood nutrition include:

### **INCREASING FEDERAL FUNDING FOR SCHOOL MEALS**

The current federal reimbursement rate to local schools has not kept pace with inflation or the increased costs of providing quality meals. Gillibrand and Quinn propose increasing the current reimbursement rate by 70 cents in the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill – from \$2.57 per meal to \$3.27 per meal. In today’s typical school lunch, a child may have chicken nuggets, chips, canned peas and canned fruit cocktail. Under this new plan, a student could have grilled chicken breast on a seven-grain roll, steamed broccoli, and a fresh fruit cup.

### **STRENGTHENING NUTRITION STANDARDS AND BANNING TRANS FATS**

New York City serves meals to 850,000 students a day and has made great strides in setting high nutrition standards locally for these meals. Gillibrand and Quinn strongly oppose any federal legislation to pre-empt New York City from setting higher standards for health and nutrition.

Gillibrand is also authoring legislation that would ensure that schools across the country follow the example of New York City in banning trans fats in any public school that receives federal reimbursements. New York City has already been the national leader on this issue, banning trans fats in restaurants and phasing trans fats out of public schools.

### **ENCOURAGING PROCUREMENT OF LOCAL FOOD**

Gillibrand and Quinn have been strong advocates for programs that develop fresh, local food for New York’s families and support programs providing technical assistance, training, and equipment for the procurement of local foods in our schools.

To this end, Gillibrand recently secured a commitment from the USDA to create a task force to promote and develop sustainable local and regional food systems. The lawmakers ask that the Child Nutrition Reauthorization continue this work in supporting procurement of local food.

### **IMPROVING NUTRITION PROGRAMS FOR INFANTS AND PREGNANT MOTHERS**

The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program helps ensure that all children have a healthy start in life by providing young mothers with nutrition education and healthy food packages. Gillibrand and Quinn support strengthening the WIC program by extending the children’s certification period from 6 months to 1 year, which would give clinics more time to focus on caring for young mothers and infants instead of filling out paperwork. The lawmakers also support repealing the hematology requirement for women to remain certified in the program, which creates an unnecessary burden for many young mothers.

\*\*\*\*\*

Additional support for the Five Point Nutrition Plan:

“Preventing our most vulnerable youth from going hungry is one of the fundamental responsibilities of city government,” said **Council Youth Services Committee Chair Lewis A. Fidler**. “But current federal programs don’t go far enough in helping us provide for all those

who need our help. These proposals will allow us to provide the most nutritious meals possible, for more children than ever before.”

“We've known for years how critical it is for students to have a healthy breakfast, and nutritious meals throughout the day,” said **Council Education Committee Chair Robert Jackson**. “We've already had some success enrolling more students for free meals, and improving nutrition levels in our schools. But if we want all children to have an opportunity to succeed, we need to find ways to build on those successes.”

“In these tough economic times, New York City is doing everything we can to keep children from going hungry,” said **Council State and Federal Legislation Committee Chair Maria Baez**. “But we can't do it alone – we need increased support from the federal government if we're going to reach as many families as possible. I'm proud to stand with Speaker Quinn and Senator Gillibrand on these critical initiatives.”

“As so many New York City children face the threats of both hunger and obesity, strong efforts must be made to improve the Child Nutrition Act,” said **State Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh**. “By increasing access to low-cost and free meals for children who live in high cost areas, we can help our children stay healthy and increase their opportunity for success in school and in life.”

“The Food Bank For New York City supports a strong 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization that expands access to high-quality, nutritious food for all children,” said **Dr. Lucy Cabrera, President & CEO of the Food Bank For New York City**. “We applaud Sen. Gillibrand and Speaker Quinn's leadership on this issue, and join them in urging Congress to bring school meals into the 21st Century by eliminating applications and make sure no child spends the school day hungry.”

“President Obama will need plenty of help at the federal, state, and local levels to reach his courageous goal of wiping out child hunger in America by 2015,” said **Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger**. “That's why I am so happy that Senator Gillibrand, Speaker Quinn, and the others involved in this announcement are providing such strong leadership in proposing important improvements to the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill in order to move us towards that vital goal.”

“I am pleased to join with Speaker Quinn on behalf of children in cities across the state,” said **Yonkers City Council President Chuck Lesnick**. “Over seventy percent of the students in the Yonkers public schools come from families with incomes so low that they qualify for free lunch. It is important that these children eat healthy meals since it is hard to learn on an empty stomach.”

“No child should have to go to school or to bed hungry. These improvements to the federal Child Nutrition Act will help ensure that local government agencies and other service providers can address the nutrition needs of our kids to help them grow up to be healthy and productive people,” said **Los Angeles City Council President Eric Garcetti**.

“Proper nutrition is the foundation for a healthy childhood. The platform that we are proposing today will go far in expanding the opportunities for parents and caregivers to provide the nutritious foods necessary to build that foundation,” **said Philadelphia Councilmember Blondell Reynolds Brown.** “I am pleased to join Speaker Quinn and our partners in this effort. Philadelphia's voice will join a chorus that, for the sake of our most vulnerable children, must be listened to Washington.”

###