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New York School Nutrition Association Questions Governor's Priorities ***"Surely feeding our children should be a bigger priority than building a football stadium"***

Albany, N.Y. – The New York State School Nutrition Association (NYSNA) today called on New York Governor Kathy Hochul to reexamine her budget and legislative priorities in the wake of yesterday's announcement of a deal to spend millions of taxpayer dollars to fund a new stadium for the Buffalo Bills instead of prioritizing funding Healthy School Meals for All.

"During this time of inflation and uncertainty, New York families are making choices based on our priorities. Parents across the state are going to be forced to make decisions about paying their bills or paying for their children to get healthy meals," said Jennifer Martin, executive director of NYSNA. "While we understand and appreciate the importance of this project to the people of Western New York, we think that before we spend \$600 million on a stadium, we should commit to feeding children healthy meals at school, which has a long-term benefit for all New Yorkers."

"Surely, feeding our children should be a bigger priority than building a football stadium," she said.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic schools across the nation have offered meals to students at no cost, ensuring they have access to a healthy breakfast and lunch each school day, even when remote learning was in place. However, federal waivers that gave schools the ability to do so are set to expire in June and the federal government has failed to extend the waivers or provide additional funding. With the issue left to states to remedy – at least on a temporary basis – NYSNA and 300 other state education associations, anti-hunger groups, child nutrition advocates, and school districts are urging state legislators and Gov. Hochul to include the Healthy School Meals for All proposal in the FY2023 state budget.

School meals are among the most effective anti-hunger programs and are proven to reduce food insecurity; improve mental and physical health; support students' ability to thrive academically; and bolster education, health, and economic equity. In schools with universal meals, students had improved results on standardized tests, attention and learning retention, and overall tardiness. Participation in school nutrition

programs also have been shown to result in decreased rates of mental illness, depression, disruptive behavior, and obesity, and improved rates of overall behavioral health. Free meals for all also reduce stigmas related to free or reduced-price meals.

Advocates for Healthy School Meals for All are calling for the establishment and funding of a permanent, statewide program to ensure students have access to a healthy breakfast and lunch each school day. In addition to all the health and academic benefits, the investment would help schools by eliminating school meal debt, which is a major burden on school district finances and staff time; streamlining administration of school meal programs so the focus can be placed on serving nutritious meals; and improving school nutrition finances as increased participation allows schools to benefit from economies of scale.

About the New York School Nutrition Association:

The New York School Nutrition Association is a cohesive group of school nutrition employees, managers, directors, registered dietitians, nutritionists, and industry members in New York State committed to ensuring that all students have access to healthy meals. NYSNA provides information, services, and continuing education to school nutrition and food service professionals in New York State. For more information:

<https://www.nyschoolnutrition.org/>

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