



February 5, 2025

The Honorable Kathleen Hochul
Governor, State of New York
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

I am writing on behalf of the WIC Association of New York State (WICANYS) to follow up on my December 11, 2024 letter to Commissioner McDonald, where we explained the need and requested an additional \$15-20 million dollars in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 to better adequately fund WIC's 85 local agencies' vital nutrition services. We sincerely thank you for the added maternal and infant health investments you proposed in your FY 2026 budget, including \$9.5 million to support New York State WIC's growing participation. Considering that our state's WIC participation has outpaced WIC's national participation growth by two to three times, we hope you share our conviction that this is a down payment to start to back-fill chronically under resourced and over-burdened local WIC programs. We commend your goal of making New York State the best and most affordable place to start a family, as well as a national leader in WIC enrollment. And we must emphasize that securing adequate resources for WIC's nutrition services is essential to achieving this objective.

Together with NYSWIC, local WIC agencies aim to ensure current and future enrollees receive equitable access to quality nutrition education, with a high level of person-centered care and supplemental nutritious foods impacting long-term health outcomes that lead to healthy lifestyles within the communities we serve.

However, it has become increasingly difficult with the near flat funding WIC agencies have borne since the FY 2016 NYS contract cycle, in conjunction with rising costs compounded by inflation. Local agency WIC budgets are inadequate to cover the full costs of clinic operations of which the primary expense is for WIC staff salaries and fringe benefits. WIC Staff provide invaluable nutrition education, breastfeeding support, referrals to healthcare providers and community resource agencies. In addition to covering the cost of staff, WIC budgets also must pay for rent, utility bills, office supplies, vital translations services and tools/systems needed to keep up with the increased demands of WIC's modernized remote services and technology for modern families.

WIC Programs across NYS continually assess how to manage their limited funding and cut program costs against the rising requests for WIC services. WIC agencies have already been experiencing staff shortages in recent years, not able to attract or keep qualified professionals for the compensation their budgets allow. We are concerned that if WIC agencies continue to be forced to shoulder inadequate and flat funding, WIC sites will be closed and staff laid off, and agencies will need to consider wait lists for new enrollments. This will be detrimental to both the current WIC families across NYS and the several hundred thousand eligible families who are not yet participating.

Together, NYSWIC now serves over 445,000 New Yorkers, a 25% increase since 2020, and was the catalyst for drawing down over [\\$405 million in federal WIC funds for healthy food purchases across our state in FY 2024 alone](#). Leveraging federal nutrition assistance funds is the single most efficient way to maximize food resources in New York. And there is much room for growth in our nation's premier maternal and child public health program. While we have seen significant growth, The Department of Health estimates NYSWIC serves about 60% of potentially eligible New Yorkers. We agree

that New York should continue to seek ways to cross promote, data match, and align eligibility determinations for nutrition assistance programs to the extent possible, and must prioritize the outreach and education needed to encourage eligible people to connect with the benefits they need. In order to serve current participants and be ready to greet and provide equitable access to WIC's nutrition services to the additional 30,000 New Yorkers you propose NYSWIC serves this coming fiscal year, an additional \$15-20 million dollars for local agencies' nutrition services is urgently requested.

Sincerely,

Lisa Fermin

Lisa Fermin, Chair WIC Association of NYS, Inc.

WICANYS is the leading nonprofit organization supporting and enhancing the services of the (WIC) Women, Infants, and Children Program. Representing 85 local WIC agencies and the vendor management organization, our volunteer board of directors is made up of local agency WIC directors, vendor management staff, partners, advocates, and participants.

CC:

Dr. James McDonald, Commissioner, NYS Department of Health

Corie Nadzan, Director, NYS WIC Program

Assembly Members:

- AM Amy Paulin, Chair of Assembly Health Committee
- AM Donna Lupardo, Chair of Assembly Agriculture Committee
- AM Andrew Hevesi, Chair of Assembly Children and Families Committee
- AM John McDonald, Chair of Assembly Governmental Operations
- AM Stacey Pheffer Amato, Chair of Assembly Government Employees Committee
- AM Maritza Davila, Chair of Assembly Social Services Committee
- AM Khaleel M. Anderson, Chair of the Food, Farm, and Nutrition Policy Task Force
- AM Michaelle Solages, Chair of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus
- AM Carrie Woerner, Chair of the Legislative Women's Caucus
- AM Jessica González-Rojas, Chair of the Task Force on Women's Issues

Senators:

- Senator Gustavo Rivera, Chair of Senate Health Committee
- Senator Michelle Hinchey, Chair of Senate Agriculture Committee
- Senator Roxanne Persaud, Chair of Senate Social Services Committee
- Senator Jabari Brisport, Chair of Senate Children and Families Committee
- Senator Lea Webb, Chair of Senate Women's Issues Committee