

Wednesday, October 27, 2021

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Schumer,

I am writing to urge you to fund essential and proven child nutrition provisions as part of the Build Back Better Act, that could give kids like me the opportunity to realize their dreams.

Today, I'm an accomplished chef. I've led kitchens at award-winning restaurants in NY, CA, and Washington, D.C. I'm an author and executive producer at Food & Wine Magazine. I know the power of food. I'm also a kid who grew up in a household that struggled to put food on the table. Raised by a hard-working mother who was a caterer – and who made just a little too much money, making us ineligible for SNAP – I relied on the school and summer meal programs during hard times.

Like so many others, the restaurant I was leading in Washington D.C. was forced to close as pandemic regulations took effect in March 2020. All I could think about was our employees: what would happen to them? How would they make it through the pandemic? Recalling my own experience as a child familiar with the persistent feeling of hunger, I couldn't fathom how they would afford groceries, let alone rent or medical care.

The pandemic has left so many kids teetering on the edge of despair, especially Black, Latino and Native American kids who have experienced the greatest hardship. Today, more than 12 million children are living in poverty and 13 million may face hunger this year, with Black and Latino households with children much more likely to experience poverty and food hardship than any other group. At the same time, these kids – Black, Latino, and Native American - are also experiencing the trauma of losing a parent, grandparent or guardian at higher rates than any other group. The disparities and the burden of this pandemic has fallen on the shoulders of kids of color and we must not leave them behind again.

Congress has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure an equitable recovery for Black, Latino and Native American kids by investing in the programs that will help to lift them out of poverty and accelerate our nation's efforts to end child hunger. I am urging you to adequately fund and pass the Build Back Better Act that includes these important provisions:

**Nationwide Expansion of the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC).**

Just like when I was growing up with my mom, many parents are working shift jobs and are unable to deliver their kids to a summer meals site. The Summer EBT program provides working families the flexibility to buy groceries at the store, enabling parents to spend days or nights at work, knowing their kids have enough food at home.

**Expansion of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).**

Cutting red tape and decreasing paperwork for families to receive the benefits for which they are eligible just makes sense. Why would we make it harder for working parents, already worried about their children's future, to provide the necessary nutrition to ensure their kids can thrive?

**Extension of the improvements to the Child Tax Credit.**

A few weeks ago, newspapers and other media were heralding the triumphs of the Child Tax Credit, which helped to keep hundreds of thousands of kids from descending further into poverty. The need has not abated. Extending these improvements gives families the time they need to secure a better financial future.

Like so many in the restaurant industry I have struggled to not lose everything, to hold onto my dreams and make it through the pandemic. I will be okay, but I cannot say that for the millions of kids who continue to struggle with the rippling effects of the pandemic. Today on behalf of the Black, Latino and Native American kids who are daring to dream and see a future beyond the pandemic, for the next Black kid from the Bronx who will be James Beard Foundation Award winner, I ask that you not leave them behind and pass the Build Back Better Act so every child can reach their full potential.

Thank you and I welcome the opportunity to talk with you about my perspective.

Sincerely,

Kwame Onwuachi



**KWAME ONWUACHI**



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