



May 8, 2007

Chairman Tom Harkin
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
U.S. Senate
Room SR-328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: S.770

Dear Chairman Harkin:

The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) commends you for your interest and support for nutrition and your steadfast promotion of programs to improve health and nutrition in the United States. However, we strongly believe that **the S.770 proposal is premature** and has a significant potential to result in negative or harmful consequences that far outweigh the benefits.

SNE is concerned with the very real possibility of negative nutrition and health education implications of your proposed legislation to enable Food Stamp resources to be used to purchase vitamin/mineral supplements. We urge you to reconsider the strengths and weaknesses of this proposed legislation and redirect these resources to a pilot study that would enable a more sound, evidence-based approach to enhancing the nutritional health of Americans.

SNE is an international organization of over 1,100 nutrition education professionals dedicated to promoting healthful sustainable food choices and sharing a vision of healthy people in healthy communities. Our members conduct research in education, behavior, and communication; develop and disseminate innovative nutrition education strategies; and communicate information of food, nutrition and health issues to students, professionals, policy makers, and the public. Articles describing this work can be found in SNE's peer-reviewed *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* and SNE's website: www.sne.org.

SNE is concerned with S.770 for the following reasons:

Lack of evidence that multivitamin/mineral supplements reduce chronic disease risk.

In 2006, an independent State-of-the-Science Panel from the National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements assessed safety and effectiveness of multivitamin/minerals and concluded that "more rigorous scientific research is needed before strong recommendations can be made regarding multivitamin/minerals use to prevent chronic diseases." In addition, the panel identified several possible risks associated with over consumption of certain nutrients. For more information on this important report, see <http://consensus.nih.gov/2006/2006MultivitaminMineralSOS028main.htm>. The concerns of this NIH panel were confirmed by a recent report in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* which reported no detectable health benefits of antioxidant nutrients taken in the form of supplements (see <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/297/8/842>).

Chairman Harkin
May 8, 2007
Re: S 770
Page 2

Contradiction with basic premise of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

A basic premise of the *Dietary Guidelines* is that “nutrient needs should be met primarily through consuming foods. Foods provide an array of nutrients (as well as phytochemicals, antioxidants, etc.) and other compounds that have beneficial effects on health.” We do not fully understand how these nutrients and compounds are dispersed and interact in foods to maintain and improve health. These same benefits can not be found in supplements of specific nutrients.

In some cases, fortified foods may be useful sources of one or more nutrients that otherwise might be consumed in less than recommended amounts. Supplements may be useful when they fill a specific identified nutrient gap that cannot or is not otherwise being met by the individual's intake of food. However, nutrient supplements cannot replace a healthful diet. Individuals who are already consuming the recommended amount of a nutrient in food will not achieve any additional health benefit if they also take the nutrient as a supplement.”

Dilution of thinly-stretched Food Stamp Program resources.

The purchasing power of food stamps has been seriously eroded so that the average Food Stamp benefit nationwide in 2007 is only \$1.05 per person per meal, making it nearly impossible for a Food Stamp household to buy even a minimally adequate diet. Diverting part of this minimal benefit to supplements would not only increase program complexity and administrative cost to the Federal government, but it would also further erode the ability of Food Stamps to fulfill their essential purpose - - to serve as the first line of defense against hunger by enabling low-income families to buy nutritious food.

SNE thanks you for being concerned about addressing the nutritional inadequacies that are prevalent in the US today. But, we urge you to give serious consideration to our concerns and work toward a more positive approach to addressing these nutritional inadequacies. Examples of initiatives that we believe would have more positive effects on health and nutrition include:

- Create and fund incentives for food purchases consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (e.g., fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat sources of calcium).
- Remove the barriers that working poor face when they apply for food assistance and simplify the application process.
- Put greater emphasis on outreach and marketing of the Food Stamp Program and other food assistance programs.
- Improve and expand the use of wireless technology so that electronic benefit transfer (EBT) customers can use food assistance dollars at farmers' markets, farm stands, and community supported farms.
- Expand and improve nutrition education, especially for low income populations, to support community based solutions to obesity and food insecurity.

Thank you for your support of nutrition programs and for considering the concerns and recommendations of the Society for Nutrition Education. If you have any questions, please call Mary Ann Passi, SNE's Executive Director at 317/328-4627. She also may be contacted at 7150 Winton Drive, Suite 300, Indianapolis, IN 46268.

Sincerely,



President
Society for Nutrition Education