

WILLIAM L. OWENS
23RD DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

October 22, 2012

PLEASE RESPOND TO
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The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I have been contacted by a number of school districts and parents regarding the reduced calorie levels in school meals. While I understand that there is great desire to ensure students are receiving a healthy meal, several school officials with whom I have spoken are concerned the new calorie levels are insufficient for students, particularly in middle school and high school.

As a supporter of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, I am particularly concerned that the rules promulgated by USDA may be working at cross purpose to the intent of the law: to provide students with a healthy meal to improve their performance during school and afterschool activities, particularly in circumstances where a child does not have access to healthy meals at home.

Although we share the goal of providing healthier meals, I believe we need to take care not to create a situation that is in fact more detrimental. Unfortunately, it has become clear that many students are simply refusing to purchase meals at school and are bringing food from home, which may or may not be a more healthy choice and is reducing school lunch revenue.

In light of this, I urge you to review the calorie rule, and in particular, to take into account the input of school districts, parents and students. This unfortunately looks like a too frequent situation in which the federal government implements a rule that does not work on the ground. Thank you for your attention to this issue. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

BILL OWENS
Member of Congress