

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

October 28, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Administrator Power:

As the world faces a global health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are writing to bring your attention to a secondary, but no less important crisis -- child wasting and malnutrition. As Members of Congress who have always championed the U.S. Government's leadership in global food security and malnutrition efforts around the world, we believe there is an urgent need for the U.S. to demonstrate leadership to combat child wasting by increasing the procurement and distribution of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) as a primary intervention.

In 2018, before the COVID-19 pandemic, 5.3 million children under the age of 5 died and severe malnutrition -- or wasting -- was responsible for nearly 50 percent or 2.4 million of these deaths. As reported in *The Lancet*, one of the world's leading medical journals, experts predict that wasting among children could rise by 14.3 percent worldwide if we do not act now. This would translate to an estimated additional 6.7 million wasted children during the first 12 months of the pandemic and more than 10,000 additional child deaths per month during this same period. Those children who do survive are at risk of impaired brain development, lower intelligence quotient, weakened immune systems, and greater risk of serious diseases.

A rise in malnutrition is inevitable as the economic and health crisis becomes a global hunger crisis, and the secondary impacts threaten care services for mothers as well as the continuation of regular health and nutrition programs for children. This increase in malnourished women and children will leave millions of children underweight, weak and vulnerable to infections and preventable diseases. Severely malnourished children are up to twelve times more likely to die of preventable diseases and it leaves children particularly at risk of pneumonia, one of the deadliest complications caused by COVID-19. Because we will undoubtedly be faced with millions of malnourished, vulnerable children, COVID-19 and its secondary impacts present an immediate, urgent danger to global child survival.

There is a proven, effective intervention for addressing severe malnutrition, or wasting -- ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF). These low-cost packets of RUTF can bring a child on the brink of death back to life in a matter of weeks, yet less than 20% of the nearly 50 million kids in need

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receive this treatment. The distribution of RUTF also continues the decades-long record of U.S. farmers and ranchers helping to feed the world, as each packet of RUTF includes agricultural inputs--peanuts, canola oil, milk, sugar and more--from producers throughout the United States.

As the impacts of COVID-19 remain to be fully realized, we believe the U.S. must increase its investment in prevention and treatment of wasting by scaling up RUTF procurement and distribution. In order to do this, we must have a clear picture of what the U.S. investment in RUTF procurement and distribution is across U.S. agencies. Therefore, we ask that both USDA and USAID provide us with baseline assessments of RUTF procurement and distribution pre-COVID and in response to COVID-19.

With this information, we can ensure that treatment and prevention for child wasting is prioritized. Specifically, we can ensure that our nutrition programs have sufficient funding and are coordinated efficiently to reach the most vulnerable children. By providing this baseline assessment, we can work together to ensure that the U.S. Government and American agriculture are leaders in combating child wasting and ultimately ending preventable, treatable childhood deaths globally.

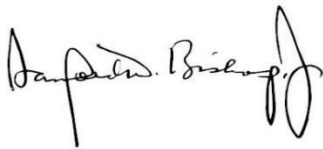
Sincerely,



Austin Scott
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress



A. Drew Ferguson IV, D.M.D.
Member of Congress

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Mike Rogers
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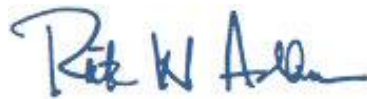
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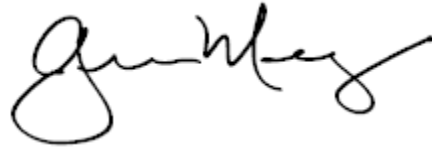
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