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SEN. RICHARD WESTMAN

STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

April 8, 2024

Hon. Bernard Sanders
United States Senate
332 Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Peter Welch
United States Senate
G-12 Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Becca Balint
House of Representatives
United States Congress
1408 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Sanders and Welch and Representative Balint:

The members of the Vermont Senate Committee on Agriculture (Committee) write to you seeking your support for passage of H.R.1147, the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2023. The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act removes a misguided federal policy that limited the type of milk schools could provide under the National School Lunch Program. Instead, the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act gives schools flexibility in the type of milk provided under the National School Lunch Program, allowing whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, and fat-free flavored and unflavored milk.

Whole milk is one of the most nutritious beverages that a school can provide growing children. A glass of whole milk contains all nine essential amino acids, making it a complete protein and high-quality option to help meet the protein needs of children. Whole milk contains vitamin D and calcium, essential in developing strong bones and teeth. Whole milk contains over half of a child's daily needs for vitamin B12, which assists in building red blood cells and the nervous system. Whole milk is also a significant source of iodine, which is necessary for brain development; selenium, which helps maintain the immune system and metabolism; and phosphorus, which is an important part of the mineral structure of bones and teeth.

The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2023 would replace an ill-conceived 2012 federal policy that revised school meal requirements to align with the Dietary Guidelines for

Americans. As a result, schools were limited to providing milk that was unflavored low-fat, flavored fat-free, and unflavored fat-free milk. The 2012 policy changes were based on the misperception that whole milk would contribute to an unhealthy diet because of its increased fat content. In reality, whole milk is approximately 97 percent fat free, which is one percent less than the reduced fat “two percent” milk that schools are allowed to provide under the National School Lunch Program. Thus, there is very little difference in fat content between “whole milk” and “reduced fat milk,” and schools should not be limited in what types of milk they provide under the National School Lunch Program.

Allowing schools to offer whole milk as part of the National School Lunch Program will also provide Vermont dairy farmers with an additional market for their milk during difficult economic times. As you know, the Vermont dairy industry is struggling and has lost over 60 percent of its farms over the last 20 years. A significant part of the loss of Vermont’s dairy farms is accountable to the federal milk market order and the inadequate price paid to farmers under that order. However, another significant part of the loss of dairy farms is the loss of market for milk and other dairy products and competition from international milk producers. The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2023 will help reinstate a market for multiple, diverse milk products in schools, while also prohibiting schools from purchasing milk products produced by certain international suppliers.

The Committee knows that each of you understand the importance of the dairy industry on the economy, culture, and landscape of Vermont. Your support for the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act will provide Vermont farms and milk producers some needed economic support while also reintroducing to school students across the country one of the most nutritious and developmentally valuable beverages for children. Thank you for your attention to the Committee’s concerns and thank you for all that you do for Vermont.

Please contact the Committee if you need additional information or have questions.

Sincerely,

Members, Vermont Senate Committee on Agriculture

Sen. Robert Starr, Chair
Sen. Brian Collamore, Vice Chair
Sen. Irene Wrenner, Clerk
Sen. Brian Champion
Sen. Richard Westman

CC: Governor Phil Scott
Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets Anson Tebbetts
Interim Secretary of Education Heather Bouchey