

# defeat **malnutrition** today

December 16, 2022

## **Statement for the Record: Setting the Table: Promoting Healthy and Affordable Food for Older Americans**

The 120+ organization Defeat Malnutrition Today Coalition commends Chairman Casey and Ranking Member Tim Scott for convening the hearing Setting the Table: Promoting Healthy and Affordable Food for Older Americans. At a time when one in two older adults either are malnourished or at risk of malnutrition, it is vital we work more to promote healthier food options and above all make them affordable and accessible.

Mr. Chairman, our Coalition was grateful to you and Senator Murray for having the GAO release its report in 2019 “Agencies Could Do More to Help Address the Nutritional Needs of Older Adults.” We hope its main recommendations can be more fully implemented in the year ahead, particularly that HHS develop a plan to include nutrition guidelines for older adults in the 2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and that HHS and USDA improve oversight of meal programs and provide additional information to meal providers to help them meet older adult nutritional needs.

We appreciate that this hearing will address some of these issues. We see the potential that your bill, the Senior Nutrition Task Force Act, which establishes an interagency task force to identify tools to combat hunger and malnutrition among older adults and adults with disabilities, can lead to a coordinated plan to improve food quality in federally funded nutrition programs.

A primary cause of malnutrition among older adults is the failure to consume adequate nutrients in the food they eat. That should not be the case when consuming food provided by federal programs. The federal government should lead the way in providing high quality, nutrient dense foods in all its nutrition programs.

As discussed in the hearing, barriers to healthy food access can be addressed when we partner with local organizations (e.g., Area Agencies on Aging, Community Based Organizations, Senior Centers) to reach seniors to educate them and assist them in taking part in federal nutrition programs. Malnutrition screening is already a part of the Older Americans Act nutrition programs, but

when a core problem such as malnutrition continues to negatively impact our population, especially our older adults, it is time to expand. We believe that federal nutrition programs should recognize the varied nutrition needs of the populations served and include medically tailored meals in programs and prescriptions for groceries and produce.

We commend the focus of this hearing, thank you.