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All children should grow up healthy. But too frequently, children go to school hungry or suffer from bad diets. This is why an amended version of the federal Child Nutrition Act is in order.

In New York City alone, 1.3 million New Yorkers, including 400,000 children, suffer from hunger, according to the New York Coalition Against Hunger. Another alarming statistic is the high incidence of obesity in our state. Among Hispanics, for example, more than 20 percent of children between the ages of two and five years old are obese, New York's health department reports. This is attributable to the quality of food, not necessarily the quantity.

Children of lower-income households are more at risk of poor nutrition—they often don't have enough healthy food alternatives or diets that are well-balanced. As well documented, obesity is a risk factor for diabetes, among other illnesses.

To address these health issues, the New York City Council is pushing for Congress to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act, a federal law that regulates food service policies for public schools, WIC and other nutrition programs. The Council has recommended amendments, such as increasing funding from \$450 million to \$1 billion and allowing Medicaid recipients nationwide to receive free lunches.

The New York City Alliance for Child Nutrition Reauthorization emphasizes that the law should also provide for access to nutritious food and educational programs on good eating habits for children and families.

The benefits of re-authorizing the Act are long term. This preventive measure helps families avoid health problems, and in turn, the medical costs incurred by states and cities when treating children for malnutrition, diabetes and heart problems that can result from a poor diet.

First Lady Michelle Obama is promoting healthy eating. President Obama wants to eliminate hunger in the United States by 2015. Congress must also do its part by re-authorizing and strengthening the Child Nutrition Act.