Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 15, 2012

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As a parent and as a member of Congress, I am writing to voice my strong concern surrounding the events that took place on Jan. 30 at West Hoke Elementary School in Raeford, North Carolina, when a school official denied a child the right to eat the lunch provided to her by her mother. State and school officials have said that this measure was taken in an attempt to follow U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines. This unfortunate and absolutely unnecessary event exemplifies the very definition of "government overreach" and further perpetuates a growing reason of why the American people continue to hold less and less faith in our government.

The content of a school lunch provided to a child by their parents should be governed only by the child's parents, not another government bureaucrat. This event is an embarrassment and distraction from the hard work done by teachers and staff throughout our schools and preschools in North Carolina, and throughout our nation. With all of the work needed to be done to help fix our education system here in America, it is absolutely ridiculous that we are wasting both our time and resources with the inspection and disqualification of perfectly healthy school lunches—provided to a child by parents, at no cost to our state or federal government. This is completely unacceptable.

While I do not know the parent involved, it is clear from news reports that the content of the lunch she provided her daughter would meet the very same standards and expectations for a healthy lunch that I, and many others, have known throughout time. I have packed similar lunches for my two daughters throughout their childhood. While I support efforts to provide more nutritious and healthier fresh food options in our schools, at no point should a government official be allowed to deny a 4-year-old child access to a parent packed lunch or imply to a child that their lunch is wrong or there is a problem with the food provided to them by their mother or father.

As the Congressman who proudly represents Raeford, North Carolina, I welcome my colleague below in joining me in my call for an immediate clarification of this ridiculously misguided provision and a refocus of the work done by those tasked with implementing it. The health and education of our children is far too valuable to be caught up in yet another example of government overreach and unwarranted involvement in the lives of our proud American families. We hope that you will take this matter seriously.

Sincerely,

Rep. Larry Kissell (NC-08)

Rep. Renee Ellmers (NC-02)

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