Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 6, 2024

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Becerra and Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your efforts to improve the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) so it continues to serve as a valuable resource for Americans to choose healthier dietary options. Policymakers and industry stakeholders rely on the DGA to create changes in public health, nutrition, and agriculture policy. As the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) consider all scientific and evidence-based recommendations for the new 2025-2030 DGA, we request HHS and USDA strongly consider adding a water icon to the MyPlate graphic. Adding the water symbol is consistent with recommendations from all relevant stakeholders and complements various initiatives from other HHS agencies.

For example, the National Clinical Care Commission made this recommendation in its report to Congress[1]

> *"USDA should add a symbol for drinking water to the MyPlate graphic and increase water promotion messaging in all consumer-facing materials issued by its Center for Nutrition Policy Promotion. Water is not currently depicted on the USDA MyPlate."*

The DGA is also an essential tool for nutrition education. While the full DGA is helpful for health care providers, educators, and public health professionals, most Americans are introduced to its nutrition recommendations through other consumer-facing materials. The MyPlate graphic, introduced in 2011, is the primary tool used to educate Americans about nutrition, and it is used in schools, childcare centers, SNAP-Ed and EFNEP, and other settings across the nation. Currently, the MyPlate graphic indicates five food categories that lead to a healthy diet – dairy, fruits, vegetables, grains, and protein. The current MyPlate graphic includes dairy (and that should continue), but it does not include water. The addition of a

[1] National Clinical Care Commission. 2022. *Report to Congress on Leveraging Federal Programs to Prevent and Control Diabetes and Its Complications, 2021*. Chapter 4. Population-Level Diabetes Prevention and Control. At https://health.gov/about-odphp/committees-workgroups/national-clinical-care-commission/report-congress, pages 38-41.

water symbol to MyPlate would put a spotlight on the importance of drinking water and would be a key strategy in helping Americans to consider healthy beverage options, improve diet quality, and positively affect their overall health.

Water — whether tap, bottled, or filtered — is essential to life and is critical to a healthy lifestyle. Adding the water symbol to MyPlate provides an opportunity for conversations about choosing healthy beverage options and developing better lifetime habits. In addition to ensuring that the human body remains hydrated, water provides a defense against a litany of negative health effects including, but not limited to, adverse cognitive and digestive functions, reduced muscle performance, weakened immunity, and fatigue,[2,3,4] as well, of course, as being a healthy substitute for beverages that are a risk factor for diet-related chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and other metabolic diseases, heart disease and other cardiovascular conditions, dental caries and more.[5,6,7,8,9,10,11]

When it comes to children and young adults, adding a symbol for water to MyPlate can be influential in helping to curb current trends. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), plain water intake is significantly lower in younger children, as well as children of ethnic minorities, older adults, non-Hispanic Black adults, and in households with lower income and lower education.[12] The agency is actively working to improve access to drinking water and other healthier beverages and highlights in a toolkit the use of water educational and promotional activities for children, caregivers, and parents to help reinforce healthy habits.[13] It also encourages the use of posters and other materials for teachers as an effective communication tool.

This policy will address an important issue faced by older Americans. Among its diet recommendations, the 2020-2025 DGA suggests that America's seniors are among the most vulnerable to dehydration. The report stated that seniors drink significantly fewer fluid ounces – about two fewer cups per day – than

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[2] Bar-David YAIR, Urkin J, Kozminsky ELY. The effect of voluntary dehydration on cognitive functions of elementary school children. *Acta paediatrica* 94, no. 11 (2005): 1667-1673.

[3] Jéquier E, Constant F. Water as an essential nutrient: the physiological basis of hydration. *European journal of clinical nutrition* 64, no. 2 (2010): 115.

[4] Hooper Lee, Bunn D, Jimoh FO, Fairweather-Tait SJ. Water-loss dehydration and aging. *Mechanisms of ageing and development* 136 (2014): 50-58.

[5] Imamura F, O'Connor L, Ye Z, Mursu J, Hayashino Y, Bhupathiraju SN, Forouhi NG. Consumption of sugar sweetened beverages, artificially sweetened beverages, and fruit juice and incidence of type 2 diabetes: Systematic review, meta-analysis, and estimation of population attributable fraction. *BMJ*. 2015;351:h3576.

[6] Neuenschwander M, Ballon A, Weber KS, Norat T, Aune D, Schwingshackl L, Schlesinger S. Role of diet in type 2 diabetes incidence: umbrella review of meta-analyses of prospective observational studies. *BMJ*. 2019. 366:l2368.

[7] Uppal V, Mansoor S, Furuya KN. Pediatric Non-alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease. *Curr Gastroenterol Rep*. 2016. 18(5):24.

[8] Yang Q, Zhang Z, Gregg EW, Flanders WD, Merritt R, Hu FB. Added sugar intake and cardiovascular diseases mortality among US adults. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2014. 174(4):516-24.

[9] Narain A, Kwok CS, Mamas MA. Soft drinks and sweetened beverages and the risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int J Clin Pract*. 2016;70(10):791-805.

[10] Valenzuela MJ, Waterhouse B, Aggarwal VR, Bloor K, Doran T. Effect of sugar-sweetened beverages on oral health: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Eur J Public Health*. 2020;31(1):122-129.

[11] Bleich S, Vercammen K. The negative impact of sugar-sweetened beverages on children's health: an update of the literature. *BMC Obes* 2018; 5:6.

[12] CDC. *Get the Facts: Data and Research on Water Consumption*. 2022. At, https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/data-statistics/plain-water-the-healthier-choice.html

[13] CDC. *Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages in Early Care and Education Settings*. 2014. At, https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/early-childhood-drinking-water-toolkit-final-508reduced.pdf.

individuals below the age of 59.[14] The National Center for Health Statistics noted that older Americans are more susceptible to dehydration due primarily to a decrease in thirst as well as an increased prevalence of chronic diseases and the use of multiple medications.[15] Several literature reviews demonstrated that dehydration in older Americans was associated with increased mortality, poorer health outcomes. Specifically, the studies demonstrated that dehydration was an independent or contributing factor for higher health care expenditures including hospital readmissions, increased use of long-term care facilities, and longer stays in rehabilitation settings.[16,17] It was also associated with contributing to the development of chronic diseases.

Including water in nutrition educational tools is practiced by governments around the world. Currently, at least 80 countries promote water consumption in their nutrition guidance graphics. However, the United States lags behind in this regard as water is noticeably absent on the most prominent educational tool the government uses to promote a healthy diet – the MyPlate nutritional graphic. As the DGA continues to advocate for healthy beverage intake rather than alternatives with added sugars, it's common sense that water be included in the visual representation of the guidelines.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of our recommendation. As water is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle, we urge the USDA and HHS to take the necessary steps to add a symbol of water, alongside the current dairy symbol, to the MyPlate nutritional graphic. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress

Robert E. Latta
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

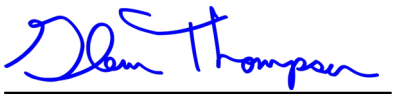
Stephanie Bice
Member of Congress

Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

Tim Walberg
Member of Congress

[14] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2020 – 2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, December 2020, https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf.
[15] Rosinger A, Herrick KA. Daily Water Intake Among US Men and Women: 2009-2012. US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, 2016.
[16] Frangeskou M, Lopez-Valcarcel B, Serra-Majem L. Dehydration in the elderly: a review focused on economic burden. *The journal of nutrition, health & aging* 19 (2015): 619-627.
[17] Edmonds CJ., Foglia E, Booth P, Fu CHY, Gardner M. Dehydration in older people: A systematic review of the effects of dehydration on health outcomes, healthcare costs and cognitive performance. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* 95 (2021): 104380.

Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



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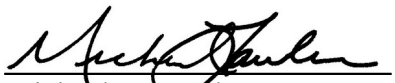

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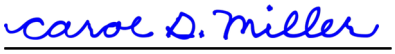

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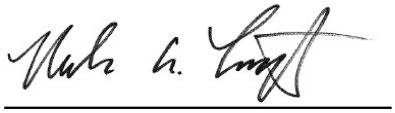

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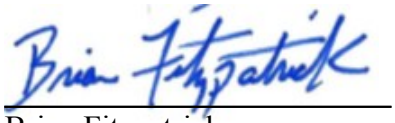

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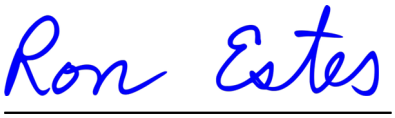
Member of Congress



Ron Estes
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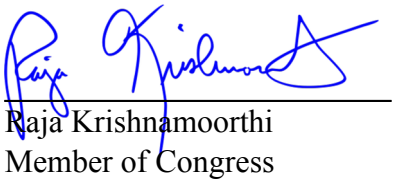

Raja Krishnamoorthi
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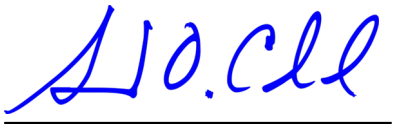

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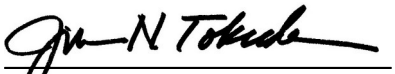

Jill Tokuda
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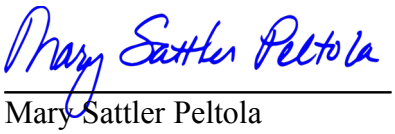
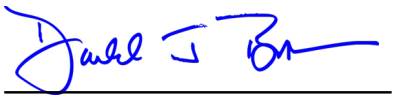


Mary Sattler Peltola
Member of Congress



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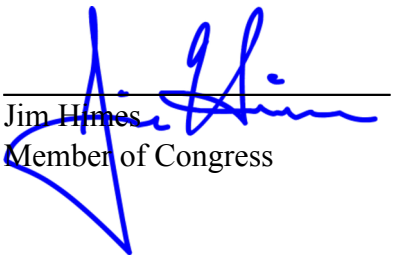

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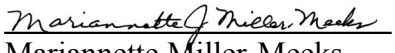

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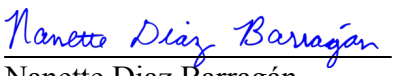

Nanette Diaz Barragán
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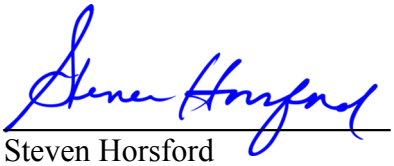

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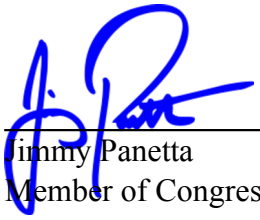
Chairman, Congressional Black Caucus



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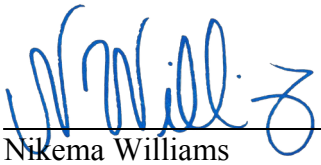

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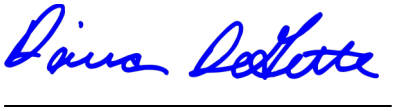

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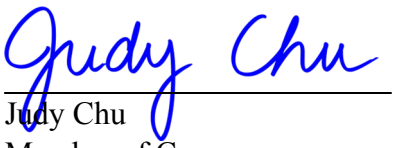

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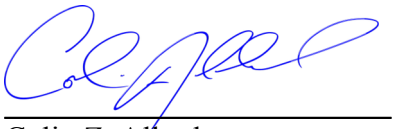

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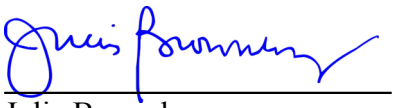

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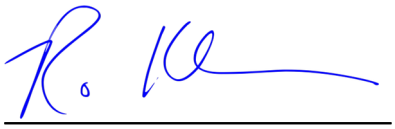

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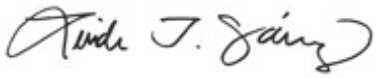

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress