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# Healthcare Nutrition Council

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## HNC Statement of Support for Medical Nutrition Equity Act

The Healthcare Nutrition Council (HNC) is pleased to express its strong support for the *Medical Nutrition Equity Act* (S. 1194 and H.R. 2587). This bipartisan, bicameral legislation would require all public and private insurance plans to cover therapeutic nutrition products intended to meet the nutritional needs of those suffering from complex medical conditions, such as digestive diseases and inherited metabolic disorders. Without access to these therapeutic nutrition products, infants, children, and adults can experience adverse health consequences, including hospitalization, intellectual impairment, behavioral dysfunction, inadequate growth, nutrient deficiencies, and even death. Unfortunately, many families may face significant financial burdens or lack of access to therapeutic nutrition products when such formulas are not covered by their insurance provider.

S. 1194 was recently introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA). Its companion bill, H.R. 2587, was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representatives John Delaney (D-MD), Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA), Michael Capuano (D-MA) and Stephen Lynch (D-MA). HNC strongly encourages other Members of Congress to express their support for this legislation by cosponsoring the legislation and working with the other sponsors to ensure it is brought forward for quick passage in this session of Congress.

Decades of research shows that specialized foods are medically necessary for the safe and effective management of digestive diseases and inherited metabolic disorders that impact the digestion, absorption, and/or metabolism of nutrients. Therapeutic nutrition products are critical products for individuals with a variety of underlying medical conditions who cannot maintain their nutritional health through their regular diets. For example, people suffering from gastrointestinal (GI) disorders, such as inflammatory bowel disease (i.e., Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis), utilize medical foods that are specifically designed to lessen symptoms of the GI disorders which cause them pain, diarrhea, weight loss and nutrient malabsorption. These specialized medical foods might contain blends of soluble fibers, vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and/or hydrolyzed protein. Additionally, infants suffering from severe food allergies can only tolerate hypoallergenic amino acid-based formulas, while some infants with milk protein allergies need alternative formula options, such as hydrolyzed formulas. Infants, children and adults use these specialized formulas to reduce their risks of developing adverse health consequences, including hospitalization, inadequate growth, nutrient deficiencies, or even death. The importance of these medically necessary foods was recognized in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress when coverage of these products was mandated for TRICARE beneficiaries under the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). HNC supports the NDAA's TRICARE expansion and believes now is the time to expand coverage for these products to all patients' insurance plans.

HNC members manufacture products specifically formulated to meet the individual nutritional needs of people with complex digestive and inherited metabolic disorders, including those addressed in the Medical Nutrition Equity Act. HNC members are committed to the health and wellbeing of those who need and use these lifesaving products. Subsequently, HNC supports policies that ensure patients have access to the therapeutic nutrition products deemed necessary to help them manage their medical conditions and positively contribute to their overall health and quality of life.

HNC is pleased to join the National PKU Alliance (NPKUA), American Academy of Pediatrics and North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition in their support of this significant legislation. We strongly encourage Congress to pass this critical legislation and for President Trump to sign it into law. The passage of this legislation will have an immediate impact on hundreds of thousands of Americans and may, among some of the sickest patients, be the difference between life and death.

**About HNC:** HNC is an organization dedicated to raising awareness of malnutrition and the profound impact nutritional status has on overall health and treatment outcomes. Our work is focused on promoting malnutrition screening, assessment and intervention in all healthcare settings, and encouraging policies that support access to nutritional therapies that patients need. We are a group of medical nutrition manufacturers working together to help healthcare professionals improve the experience of care, improve the health of populations, and reduce the costs of care.