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SCHAKOWSKY & DURBIN ANNOUNCE COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATION TO PROTECT STUDENTS FROM FOOD-BORNE ILLNESSES

SAFE SCHOOL FOOD ACT OF 2003 TO INCREASE FEDERAL OVERSIGHT OF SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), the top Democrat on the Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection Subcommittee, today joined Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) in announcing comprehensive legislation to increase protection for students against food-borne illnesses.[] []

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"Twenty-seven million children participate in the National School Lunch program every day and each and every one of them is at risk of contracting a food-borne illness.[] The federal government cannot continue to take a hands-off approach when it comes to the quality of school lunches and the safety of our nation's students," Schakowsky said.

The Safe School Food Act of 2003, which was introduced in the Senate and will soon be in the House, would increase federal oversight of the school lunch program.[] [] U.S. Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) is an original cosponsor of the legislation.[] Specifically, the Safe School Food Act of 2003 would:

- incorporate USDA safety guidelines into schools' procurement contracts;[]**
- give the Secretary of Agriculture authority to require pathogen testing in purchased food as needed;**
- provide methods to share food suppliers' safety records with the appropriate state education personnel;**
- provide vendor information to states;[]**
- allow for mandatory recall of any tainted food (donated or purchased); and[]**
- give districts the tools and information to more safely prepare food and track supplies.**

During a joint Congressional hearing last year on school lunch safety, Schakowsky proposed the creation of a comprehensive database by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration.[] The database would include the same information the USDA uses in its contracting decisions.[] In addition, it would include information from the FDA on inspection and compliance.[] The Safe School Food Act of 2003 takes the first steps towards implementation of that proposal.

From 1990 through 1994, Illinois authorities reported only three school food outbreaks, in which 66 children were sickened. But during the next six years, the average annual number of Illinois school food outbreaks more than tripled, and the number of youths affected increased tenfold, state records show.[] Nationwide, between 1990 and 2000, there were nearly 100 reported outbreaks of food-borne illness in schools affecting

thousands of children, many of them resulting in significant health consequences.

"By passing the Safe School Food Act of 2003, we can to put an end to large scale outbreaks of food-borne illness in our public schools. I look forward to working with Senator Durbin and other leaders to achieve that critical goal," Schakowsky said.

"With all the concerns parents face today, they should not have to have to fact the added fear that their children's lunch may sicken or even kill their child. As a former teacher and a proud grandmother, I know how important it is for the government to take an active role in assuring parents that we are doing everything possible to protect their children from harm. Implementation of this bill will go a long way toward that end," Schakowsky added.