

# CONGRESSMAN JARED POLIS

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## THE SLICE (SCHOOL LUNCH IMPROVEMENTS FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION) ACT

### *Restoring Better Nutrition in School Meals*

For too long, pizza has been defined as a vegetable in school meals across the country, replacing opportunities for students of all ages to eat nutritious vegetables in public schools. Although not all schools have defined pizza so absurdly, efforts to prevent such abuses were blocked by Congress last year. The SLICE (School Lunch Improvements for Children's Education) Act would restore our ability to provide students with more healthful meals by setting more sensible and appropriate standards for pizza in public school meals.

In December 2010, the Congress updated national school meal standards in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act to reflect the latest nutrition science and to address alarming increases in child obesity rates and other troubling indicators of child health. The current Congress, however, short-circuited these efforts when it blocked the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rules to put the new standards into effect and ensure that pizza would not be considered a vegetable. Congress succumbed to pressure from the frozen food industry and added an appropriations amendment to prohibit this rational approach by artificially inflating the amount of tomato paste in one slice of pizza.

The SLICE Act would restore USDA's authority to implement healthful standards to pizza in public schools in three significant ways:

- Allow the USDA to accurately count 1/8 of a cup of tomato paste as 1/8 of a cup, instead of half of a cup, which qualifies pizza as a vegetable;
- Allow the USDA to implement science-based sodium reduction targets; and,
- Allow the USDA to set a whole grain requirement.

Pizza provides a small amount of nutrients from the tomato paste in it but it also loaded with sugar, salt, bread and cheese, which carry a great deal of fat and carbohydrates that turn into sugar during digestion, which are all of great concern as Type II diabetes rates among children and child obesity continue to climb.

Pizza has a place in school meals but equating it with broccoli, carrots and celery seriously undermines this nation's efforts to support children's health and their ability to learn through better school nutrition. Its nutritional content should be accurately reflected in school meal standards. Federal, state and local taxpayer dollars should not be supporting unhealthy eating practices just because it benefits certain special interests.