

October 8, 2025

Mayor Eric Adams
Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Michelle Morse
Mayor's Office of Food Policy Executive Director Kate MacKenzie
New York City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Via email and mail

Re: Concerns Regarding New York City's New Food Standards for Public Agencies

Dear Mayor Adams and Members of the Mayor's Office of Food Policy,

On behalf of the National Chicken Council (NCC), which represents companies that produce and process more than 95 percent of chicken in the United States, I am writing to share our perspective on the recently announced New York City food standards that will prohibit "processed meats" in meals served by city agencies, including public schools.

We share your commitment to improving the health and well-being of New Yorkers. Our request is simple: nutrition and student acceptance, not a process label, should be used to determine the acceptability of school entrées. By banning foods based solely on the extent of their processing, the new standards risk stigmatizing safe, affordable, and nutrient-dense proteins – like chicken – that millions of families rely on.

Chicken products – including items such as nuggets or patties – provide high-quality, complete protein, as well as key vitamins and minerals such as niacin, vitamin B6, phosphorus, and iron. They are also naturally free of added sugars. These nutritional benefits should not be dismissed simply because chicken is cut, formed, or breaded, nor do these processes impact the nutritional benefit of these products. A process-first definition of "healthy" overlooks what truly matters: nutrient composition.

Educators and school nutrition professionals know that children are more likely to eat meals anchored by familiar items such as chicken nuggets or tenders. These items serve as "carrier foods" that ensure participation and reduce plate waste, while allowing schools to successfully pair them with vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Eliminating them entirely could unintentionally reduce meal participation and leave children less nourished.

Minimally-processed foods are often more expensive, shorter in shelf life, and more labor-intensive to prepare. Public programs operate on tight budgets and must balance nutrition with practicality. Removing cost-effective, protein-rich options like chicken would drive up cost, increase food waste, and reduce access to high-quality protein for children, seniors, and other populations served by city programs.

Evaluate participation, plate waste, and healthy eating index (HEI). The chicken industry has a strong track record of aligning with nutrition policy, including reformulating products for lower sodium and offering whole-grain options for schools. We are committed to working with New York City to ensure that schoolchildren, older adults, and other populations served by city agencies receive meals that are both nutritious and acceptable.

Mayor Adams, we respect your dedication to public health and believe we can achieve our shared goal of healthier meals by focusing on outcomes that matter – nutrients, participation, and affordability – rather than process labels. To that end, we respectfully request a brief administrative clarification from the Mayor's Office of Food Policy and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene confirming that formed and breaded poultry products meeting New York City's nutrient and additive standards remain eligible for purchase and service. Issuing such a guidance would allow the Department of Education, Office of Food and Nutrition Services, and vendors to proceed confidently, ensuring that safe, familiar, and nutrient-rich foods like chicken can continue to be served as part of city menus.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with your team to discuss how these goals can be achieved in partnership in the coming weeks

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ashley B. Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ashley" being more prominent and the last name "Peterson" written in a more compact, stylized manner.

Ashley B. Peterson, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President, Scientific & Regulatory Affairs
National Chicken Council