



Child Nutrition Reauthorization

BOLD STRATEGIES TO FIGHT CHILD HUNGER

No child should go hungry. But far too many children already live in food insecure households, and the COVID-19 has only exacerbated the problem: 23.6% of California households with children are food insecure, with deep disparities for Black (24.2%) and Latinx (32.1%) families compared to white (13.8%) families.

California made history in 2021 by becoming the first state in the nation to enact healthy school meals for all, ensuring that all children receive meals at school that are free of shame, stigma, and school meal debt. Pandemic-EBT has been equally transformational to supplement grocery budgets when school meals are not available, providing over \$7.4 billion in benefits during the first two years of program implementation.

Build Back Better to a Hunger-Free Future

The House-passed Build Back Better Act (H.R.5376) contains nutrition policies critical to California's children. These modest investments would have an outsized impact in advancing a hunger-free future for our children and must be included in any COVID-19 recovery package:

- » **Community Eligibility Provision:** *statewide CEP would mean 91-96% of the meals served would be reimbursed at the highest federal free rate. This builds on California's historic School Meals for All, enabling vital savings for our state that can be used to reinvest in healthy school meals, workers, and kitchen infrastructure.*
- » **Summer EBT** *would help to close the hunger gap that millions of children experience during summer break when they lose access to school meals. Over 3.8 million children in California would qualify for Summer EBT benefits.*
- » **School Kitchen Funding** *and the healthy school meals incentive demonstration project would support schools in providing nutritious meals.*


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California anti-hunger advocates ask our Delegation to support bold proposals that address the scale of this crisis. Child nutrition programs have not been reauthorized since the 2010 Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, delaying the opportunity to make necessary investments for these strong programs to fully meet the need and to better support education and health. With so many children experiencing hunger, Congress must leverage key advances during COVID-19 to build a hunger-free future for our children. Any investments, however, must not undermine other critical programs serving communities that are historically and persistently under-resourced (such as SNAP).

Congress must build on the coast-to-coast embrace of healthy school meals for all, and ensure that school meals are available to all children across the country. During the pandemic, schools have been able to offer free meals to all students. Congress must make this permanent, unleashing a series of benefits to: improve access for more children, prevent stigma, eliminate unpaid school meals debt, and reduce administrative work for school nutrition department workforces. Congress should permanently authorize investments in the Build Back Better Act.

Legislation has been introduced to enact these priorities for school meal programs as well as for out-of-school time, including:

- » **Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021** (S. 1530/H.R. 3115)
 - › *No child should go hungry. School meals are a critical resource and an educational tool that reduces stigma, ends meal debt, and fosters health, well being, and opportunity.*
 - › *Provides school breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students.*
 - › *Makes additional improvement to expand access and increase funding for the child nutrition programs.*
- » **Stop Child Hunger Act** (S. 1831/H.R. 3519)
 - › *Use the SNAP EBT model to provide nutrition assistance when school meals are not available, such as during summer, school breaks, and emergency school closures.*
- » **Summer Meals Act of 2021** (S. 1170/H.R. 783)
 - › *Allow non-profits like food banks to feed kids all year using the Summer Food Service Program, instead of switching back and forth between Summer Food and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.*
 - › *Improve area eligibility for Summer Meal sites to address barriers to food access.*
 - › *Allows sites to provide three meals a day during the summer.*
 - › *Provides grants for transportation.*
- » **Keeping School Meals Flexible Act** (H.R. 6613)
 - › *Extends USDA's authority to issue child nutrition waivers to address the impacts of and recovery from the pandemic through June 30, 2023.*



"[P-EBT] helped immensely with the household budget with five kids being out of school. It would have been very hard to provide food they would have normally gotten at school and pay the bills with a smaller income of my single parent home." – P-EBT Recipient

Expand food access for our youngest children

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) plays a vital role in stabilizing childcare infrastructure, supports parents' ability to return to work, yet meals and snacks remain out of reach for too many as only 38% of child care programs participate in CACFP. CACFP also supports older adults. As California's older adult population grows – and elders with low income are disproportionately Black and Latinx - our state needs equitable investments in nutrition programs to support healthy aging.

- » **Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act of 2021** (H.R. 5919)
 - › Allow an additional meal or snack for children in a full day of care.
 - › Improve reimbursement rate adjustments for child care home providers, making sure reimbursements keep up with the cost of providing a healthy CACFP meal.
 - › Streamline participation for parents and providers by moving to annual eligibility for proprietary child care centers.
 - › Maximize technology to eliminate overly burdensome and outdated paperwork.
- » **Access to Healthy Foods for Young Children Act of 2021** (S. 1270)
 - › Pilot a mechanism for providing universal meal access to children in child care.
 - › Increase reimbursement rate for providers and sponsors by 10 cents.
 - › Allow an additional meal for children in full-day childcare.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides pregnant and postpartum mothers, infants, and young children access to nutritious foods, nutrition education, and breastfeeding support. WIC serves over 6.2 Million people and half of all infants in the US. Our state's program fails to reach all young children in need. For example, about 500,000 children enrolled in Medicaid are presumptively eligible for WIC, but not enrolled. Federal policies are necessary to remove the barriers standing between our youngest learners and the food they need.

California priorities include:

- » **Address gaps in nutrition assistance** and streamline eligibility. Extend certification periods to two years for infants, Extend postpartum eligibility to two years, and extend child eligibility until their sixth birthday.
- » **Permanently improve access** to WIC services to reach more children. Allow remote certification by phone or video. Remotely load benefits into a participant's EBT card. Promote healthcare integration.
- » **Modernize benefit redemption**, develop online ordering, online shopping and permit home delivery to ensure equitable shopping options.
- » **Wise Investment in Children Act** (S. 853/H.R. 2011)
 - › Extend postpartum eligibility to two years, and children to age 6.
 - › Extend infant certification periods to two years
- » **Modern WIC Act** (S. 3226)
 - › Extend postpartum eligibility to two years, and children to age 6.
 - › Permit remote certifications by video or phone
 - › Promote greater collaboration with healthcare providers — flexibility to submit health assessment data from a physician's office
 - › Allow remote benefit issuance through EBT technology

California continues to lead by building on the historic success of School Meals for All, by being the first in the nation to ensure all children receive free school breakfast and lunch and by proposing new investments in school kitchen infrastructure and healthy school meals. If enacted in federal law, these policies would increase food security for all children.

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