

# 2023 Federal Priorities: Child Nutrition Reauthorization

## **BOLD STRATEGIES TO FIGHT CHILD HUNGER**

No child should ever go hungry. Yet far too many California children continue to face food insecurity which has been exacerbated by the severe health and economic effects of the pandemic and the unprecedented inflation: 26% of California households with children are food insecure, with deep disparities for Black (29%) and Latine (33%) families compared to White (18%) families.<sup>1</sup>

### **Critical Child Nutrition Investments are Needed**

California made history by becoming the first state in the nation to enact healthy school meals for all, ensuring all children can receive two meals at school at no cost that are free of shame, stigma, and school meal debt.

We applaud Congress for allocating funds and providing the opportunity for states to enroll in a new permanent Summer EBT program, a longtime California priority. Summer EBT is a crucial, effective step in addressing the needs of children who require reliable, year-round access to nourishing meals. However, the end of Pandemic EBT and SNAP Emergency Allotments represents a loss of one-third of the federal nutrition safety net.

Any investment, however, should never come at the expense of SNAP.<sup>2</sup> The 117th Congress enacted Summer EBT, but unfortunately offset the cost of this historic expansion by prematurely ending SNAP Emergency Allotments that has precipitated a hunger cliff for 5 million Californians, including 1.8 million children.<sup>3</sup>

With so many children experiencing hunger, Congress must fight for strong policies to strengthen the safety net, build on key advances enacted during COVID-19, and to protect the nutrition programs that ensure the wellbeing of our children.

### **Key Legislation fo Advance a Hunger-Free Future for All Children**

- » **Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021** (S. 1530 Sanders 117th/H.R. 3115 Omar 117th)
  - › Provides school breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students.
  - › Increases school meal reimbursement to match USDA's 2019 study recommendations.
  - › Provides up to three meals and a snack for young children in childcare.
  - › This is critical to ensure the sustainability of the Universal meals program in California.
- » **School Meals Expansion Act** (H.R. 2567 McGarvey 118th)
  - › Advance school meals for all nationwide, with outsized impact in California.
  - › Would lower schools' community eligibility by lowering the eligibility threshold from 40% to 25%.
  - › Increase the multiplier for federal reimbursement from 1.6 to 2.5.
- » **No Hungry Kids in Schools Act** (H.R. 9482 Porter 117th)
  - › Creates a statewide Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) option to prevent child hunger and support schools.
- » **Healthy Meals Help Kids Learn Act** (H.R. 1269 McGovern 118th)
  - › Permanently increases the federal reimbursement level for all free, reduced-price, and paid-rate school meals (45 cents for lunch served and 28 cents breakfast).
- » **Helping Schools Feed Kids Act of 2023** (H.R. 1424 Spanberger 118th)
  - › The Keep the Kids Fed Act of 2022 increased federal reimbursements for school lunch by 40 cents and breakfast by 15 cents through the 2022-2023 school year.
  - › This bill would extend these increased reimbursement rates through the 2023-2024 school year.
- » **Expanding Access to School Meals Act** (Porter 118th)
  - › Repeals reduced priced breakfast and lunch.
  - › Sets poverty level for free lunch to 200%.
  - › Direct Certification For Children Receiving Medicaid Benefits.
  - › Increase of CEP Multiplier to 2.5.

### **Bold Strategies to Prevent Hunger During Summer & Out of School Time**

- » **Stop Child Hunger Act** (S. 1831 Murray 117th/H.R. 3519 Levin 117th)
  - › While Summer EBT is now permanently authorized, additional action is needed to improve benefit adequacy, ensure equitable access, and support states with complex data sharing and interagency coordination.
- » **Summer Meals Act of 2021** (S. 1170 Gillibrand 117th/H.R. 783 Young 117th)
  - › Allow nonprofits to feed kids all year using the Summer Food Service Program, instead of switching 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 to reach underserved areas.

*"[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." – Pandemic 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, and 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.

- » **Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act of 2021** (H.R. 5919 Bonamici 117th)
  - › Allow an additional meal or snack for children in a full day of care.
  - › Improve reimbursement rate adjustments for childcare home providers.
  - › Streamline participation by moving to annual eligibility for proprietary childcare centers.
  - › Maximize technology to eliminate overly burdensome and outdated paperwork.
- » **Access to Healthy Foods for Young Children Act of 2021** (S. 1270 Casey 117th)
  - › 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 close to one million Californians and half of all infants in the U.S. Our state's program fails to reach all young children in need. 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 Casey 117th/H.R. 2011 DeLauro 117th)
  - › Extend postpartum eligibility to two years, and children to age 6.
  - › Extend infant certification periods to two years.
- » **Modern WIC Act** (S. 3226 Gillibrand 117th)
  - › Extend postpartum eligibility to two years, and children to age 6.
  - › Permit remote certifications by video or phone.
  - › Promote greater collaboration with healthcare providers.
  - › Allow remote benefit issuance through EBT technology.

California continues to lead, building on the historic success of School Meals for All, and fight childhood hunger during summer, which would increase food security for all children if enacted in federal law:

- » Enhance school nutrition standards based on specific pediatric scientific recommendations.
- » Provide adequate time to eat school meals.
- » Allow for a second entree to be served to older students when nutritionally appropriate.
- » Ensure two meals are provided on shortened school days.
- » Strengthen the adequacy of Summer EBT benefits as demonstrated by Summer P-EBT.

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