

# Senate Bill 225

## Summer Meals for All

Senator Jerry McNerney (SD 5)

### THIS BILL

In California, the world's 5th largest economy, hunger remains a daily reality for millions of families. More than one in four California households with children are food insecure. That amounts to more than 1 million households facing hunger in the state – even as cost of living continues to skyrocket.

SB 225 expands California's free summer meals program to allow a parent, guardian, or caregiver to receive a meal with their child, helping to fight hunger during these uncertain economic times.

### ISSUE

[Recent data shows 27% of California households with children experience food insecurity](#), with higher rates among Black (43%) and Latine (33%) families compared to white households (19%). Most food-insecure parents regularly skip meals so their children can eat, creating a destructive cycle that undermines family wellbeing. [When parents go hungry, both adult and child mental health suffers](#), leading to increased depression, stress, and anxiety for the entire family. Hunger can cause people to become violent, irritable, or lethargic, and children living in households experiencing hunger can be at higher risk of harm.

Young parents under 25, whose brains are still developing, face particular risk from chronic malnutrition. [Early-life malnutrition has been linked to long-term cognitive and behavioral impairments, including reduced IQ, attention problems, and school failure, which can persist into adolescence and even affect future generations](#). Young parents are also least likely to know how to navigate the state's social services programs which could provide them money for food and shelter.

Thanks to the California's Universal Meals Program, all children now have access to free school meals throughout the academic year. But in the summer parents from food-insecure households often cannot compensate for the loss of school meals when children are home full-time. They face impossible choices between their own

nutrition and their children's needs, with devastating consequences for family health.

During the summer, children have access to the federally funded Summer Food Services Program (SFSP), which provides meals during week days at specified locations like food banks, summer schools, and libraries. However, this program only serves children and teens 18 and younger, excluding caregivers. This means caregivers who bring a child to receive a free meal and who are likely hungry themselves cannot eat while their child eats and are often asked to wait outside the facility while their child eats. This is especially problematic for people with young kids or kids with disabilities who may not be able to eat alone, and does not address the larger issue of family hunger.

By allowing a caregiver to sit and eat alongside their children, SB 225 strengthens the impact of summer meal programs, ensures young children and children with disabilities are able to participate, and supports the well-being of entire families.

### SOLUTION

SB 225 would:

- Create a state-funded reimbursement process that would allow summer meals operators to serve a parent, or guardian who accompanies a child to meal sites.
- Require the State Department of Education to develop guidance for program implementation.

### SUPPORT

California Association of Food Banks (Sponsor)

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