



# Sasha Renée Pérez

REPRESENTING SENATE DISTRICT 25

## Senate Bill 411 (Pérez) Stop Child Hunger Act of 2025

### Summary

SB 411 addresses the gap in access to school meals by ensuring California maximizes federal SUN Bucks aid, and streamlining both families' access and schools' administrative processes through the implementation of a single statewide web application.

### Background

California has been a national leader in efforts to expand access to school meals for students. In 2022, the state became the first in the nation to provide free school meals to all students, regardless of income eligibility.<sup>1</sup>

Building on this effort, California implemented the SUN Bucks program in 2023, following the passage of the 2022 Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act.<sup>2</sup> The SUN Bucks program provides students with a \$120 EBT card distributed across June, July, and August, to purchase eligible groceries from most stores, farmer's markets, and other authorized retailers, including online at stores like Amazon and Walmart.<sup>3</sup> In 2024, California enrolled nearly 5 million eligible children.<sup>4</sup>

### Problem

Although California has made tremendous efforts to provide and expand access to school meals, there are still existing gaps in accessibility. According to state data, approximately 5.6 million school children are eligible for the SUN Bucks program, yet approximately 1.8 million eligible children have yet to apply. The gap in access for these students is primarily due to their enrollment in schools that have elected the federal Community Eligibility

Provision. Rather than being "directly certified," these students must apply for the SUN Bucks program on their own. USDA regulations require states to provide a "single application" to streamline access for families starting in summer 2025.

Another challenge limiting access to school meals is the reluctance of families to apply for meals if their student's school uses a third party platform. Some third party applications have raised concerns about collecting sensitive information that can be sold or compromised without notification.

Additionally, SUN Bucks and on-site school meals are not available during school campus closures. Regular school breaks result in children losing a critical nutrition resource, further straining family budgets. Unanticipated closures due to disasters, without emergency food assistance, exacerbate low-income families' exposure to the intersection of hunger-related poverty and environmental injustice.

### Solution

SB 411 addresses the gaps in school meal access by creating an accessible and secure year-round child nutrition safety net program through the following measures:

1. Establishing a single statewide website for families to submit their SUN Buck application.
2. Codifying key child privacy protections including preventing the sale of children's data.

<sup>1</sup> <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/universal-school-meals-help-all-california-children-thrive/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/sun-bucks/what-are-sun-bucks>

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<sup>3</sup> IBID.

<sup>4</sup> IBID.

3. Requiring school meal applications to include the SUN Bucks application to improve uptake and cross-program awareness;
4. Creating the Better Out of School Time (BOOST) Nutrition benefit, built on SUN Bucks, to combat child hunger during regularly scheduled school breaks and emergency school closures.
5. Supporting school nutrition professional opportunities by increasing opportunities to work additional hours, providing on-site meal options during school breaks and emergency closures.

#### **Sponsors:**

California Association of Food Banks (Co-Sponsor)  
 GRACE/End Child Poverty California (Co-Sponsor)  
 SEIU California (Co-Sponsor)

#### **Support**

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 Alchemist CDC  
 American Academy of Pediatrics, California  
 Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement  
 California Catholic Conference  
 California Food and Farming Network  
 California Immigrant Policy Center  
 California Teachers Association  
 California WIC Association  
 Ceres Community Project  
 Community Action Partnership of Orange County  
 Community Food Bank of San Benito  
 Courage California  
 Early Matters Fresno  
 Farm2People  
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#### **Contact**

[Alison.Kostusak@sen.ca.gov](mailto:Alison.Kostusak@sen.ca.gov)  
 916-651 -4025