



# Fact Sheet

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

## ***Pandemic Child Hunger Prevention Act***

*Expanding access to free school meals for all children during the COVID-19 pandemic and preventing the collapse of school nutrition programs*

### **Background**

America was struggling with child hunger long before COVID-19. In 2018, a government report revealed that more than seven [percent of households with children](#) experienced food insecurity, meaning their access to adequate daily nutrition was either restricted or uncertain.

But the pandemic has made this heartbreaking problem even worse. In the wake of record unemployment and widespread economic hardship, millions of children across the country are at risk of going hungry. Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) are particularly vulnerable. In the early weeks of the pandemic, Black and Hispanic households with children were already reporting [food insecurity rates of more than 37 percent](#), twice that of white households with children.

Meanwhile, school meal programs – one of our most powerful tools to prevent child hunger and support struggling families – are facing an existential financial crisis. School closures led to a steep decline in revenues for programs that already operate on razor-thin margins with mostly fixed costs. In May, program directors reported a median estimated loss of \$200,000 per district, with an estimated loss of as much as \$2.35 million in larger districts.

Without congressional action, many schools will be forced to consider laying off staff and discontinuing their participation in the federal school meal programs, leaving low-income children with no nutrition support at school.

Even if schools can sustain their nutrition programs, the challenge of determining and documenting which students are newly eligible for reduced-price and free school meals during the pandemic will present yet another barrier for children, parents, and school administrators.

### **About the Bill**

The *Pandemic Child Hunger Prevention Act* would help prevent child hunger, support school meal programs, and streamline access for families and schools during the pandemic. Under this legislation:

- **All students will temporarily be made eligible for free school meals during the 2020-2021 school year** through the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).
  - Due to the flexibility granted to USDA under the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*, free school meals will be available to students during remote learning through “grab and go” or meal delivery.
  - All school districts, including those operating off-site services, can serve all children without having to certify the eligibility of each individual child.

- **Anywhere in the country, schools and non-profit community partners can operate meal services, including off-site,** under the Summer Food Service Programs (SFSP) and the Summer Seamless Option (SSO), where they can serve all children without having to certify the eligibility of each individual child.
- **Anywhere in the country, schools and non-profit community partners will be able to serve afterschool meals and snacks,** under the *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) At-Risk Afterschool Program* or the *NSLP Afterschool Snack Program*, without having to certify the eligibility of each individual child.
- **All Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) day care homes will be eligible for reimbursement** at the Tier 1 level.

This legislation is endorsed by AASA, The School Superintendents Association; the American Academy of Pediatrics; Food Research and Action Center (FRAC); Feeding America; the National Education Association (NEA); the American Federation of Teachers (AFT); the School Nutrition Association; the American Public Health Association; Center for American Progress; Hunger Free America; UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity; FoodCorps; National Farm to School Network; Bread for the World; American Commodity Distribution Association; National Association of School Nurses; Children’s HealthWatch; Trust for America’s Health; National PTA; United Fresh Produce Association; MomsRising; Urban School Food Alliance; the American Heart Association; MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger; the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; Center for Science in the Public Interest; Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP); the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education and Policy, Teachers College, Columbia University; First Focus Campaign for Children; Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO); Social Security Works; National Urban League; and Children's Defense Fund.

## **House Democrats’ Plan to Preserve Access to Child Nutrition During School Closures**

Since many schools are not be able to safely reopen for in-person instruction, the *Pandemic Child Hunger Prevention Act* is supplemented by other Democratic proposals intended to serve students attending full-time in-person instruction, remote learning, or a hybrid.

- 1. Allow the Summer Food Service Program/Seamless Summer Option (SFSP/SSO) to continue next year and waive area eligibility.** Congress provided authority to the Department of Agriculture (the Department) to allow child nutrition programs to operate SFSP/SSO during the pandemic, and to waive area eligibility requirements so that “open sites” can be operated anywhere. However, the Department has only extended these authorities through the end of August. The Department must immediately renew these waivers for School Year 2020-2021.
- 2. Provide free meals to all students through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) next year.** Chairman Bobby Scott is introducing legislation to allow all meals through NSLP and SBP to be served for free next year. This will eliminate the need for burdensome paperwork and increase reimbursement to schools to help school meal programs stay afloat.
- 3. Extend and expand the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) Program.** In the *Heroes Act*, the House took action to extend P-EBT through fiscal year 2021, and to expand the program to young children who would otherwise be receiving meals in child care.
- 4. Provide emergency financial relief for school meal programs and CACFP.** The House took action to provide emergency relief for child nutrition program operators in the *Heroes Act*. The Senate must pass this legislation immediately.