



Child Nutrition Reauthorization **BOLD STRATEGIES TO FIGHT CHILD HUNGER**

No child should go hungry, yet because of COVID-19 **29.5% of California households with children are food insecure**, with deep disparities for Black (26.3%) and Latinx (36.8%) families compared to white (22.9%) families.

California anti-hunger advocates ask our Delegation to support bold proposals that address the scale of this crisis. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is the most important child hunger program, and child nutrition programs have not been improved since the 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act. 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 programs serving low-income communities.**

Provide free school meals for all

School breakfast and lunch are a lifeline, sometimes the only meals available to low-income children. During the pandemic, schools have been able to offer free meals to all students. Congress must make this permanent, unleashing a series of benefits as school campuses re-open, including to: improve access for more children, prevent stigma, eliminate unpaid school meals debt, and reduce administrative work for school nutrition departments and their workforce that have invaluable served children and families through this crisis.

- » **Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021 (S. 1530 / H.R. 3115)**
 - › *No child should go hungry. School meals for all guarantees this, and ends meal debt and shaming.*
- » **Expanding Access to School Meals Act (H.R. 5308 / S. 2752 116th)**
 - › *Improves direct certification and the Community Eligibility Provision that are vital tools for schools to achieve universal meal access.*

Permanently support children when they are most hungry, during summer & out of school times

Thanks to California's Congressional leaders, Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) has been a highlight amidst the hardship of COVID-19. In California, P-EBT has brought **\$2 billion in federal benefits to 3.7 million** low-income children, **reaching 95% of eligible students**. Summer EBT has long been a priority of the anti-hunger community, led by the California delegation, but limited funding has prevented California from implementing this critical program. **USDA's evaluation** shows that Summer EBT through the SNAP model reduces Very Low Food Security by nearly one-third, a rare intervention that benefits the lowest-income children. Congress must build on the success of P-EBT and ensure children have food during school breaks and unanticipated closures due to disasters.

- » **Stop Child Hunger Act – Rep. Levin (S. 1831 / H.R. 3519)**
 - › *Provide food aid when school meals are not available through the SNAP EBT model.*
- » **Summer Meals Act of 2021 (S. 1170 / H.R. 783)**
 - › *Allow non-profits like food banks to feed kids all year using the "Summer Seamless" option.*
 - › *Improve area eligibility for Summer Meal sites to address barriers to food access.*

"[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, supporting 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, and as **California's low-income older adult population grows**, disproportionately Black and Latinx, our elders need investments in nutrition programs to support healthy aging.

- allow a much-needed afternoon snack or supper for children in full-day child care;
- allow the use of direct certification, and create Community Eligibility Provision options including for adult day centers; and
- build on lessons learned during COVID-19 and continue to streamline access by
 - allowing annual eligibility for proprietary centers;
 - improving the area eligibility test to reach family providers in rural and other low-income areas;
 - increasing program reimbursements for CACFP providers and sponsors; and
 - continuing to allow young adults to receive three meals at homeless and youth shelters.

» Access to Healthy Foods for Young Children Act of 2021 (S. 1270)

- › Pilots a mechanism for providing universal meal access to children in child care and other substantive changes to expand access to free meals for our youngest learners.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides low-income pregnant and postpartum mothers, infants, and young children nutritious foods and nutrition education. 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 to:

- extend certification periods to two years for infants and postpartum women, and enrollment for children until their sixth birthday;
- permanently improve children's access by dropping the requirement for enrolling in person and making permanent the option to remotely enroll over the phone or by video and the ability to shop online.

» Wise Investment in Children Act (S. 853 / H.R. 2011)

- › Extends infant and postpartum women's eligibility to two years, and children to age 6.

California is again leading, **crafting first in the nation proposals** for **bold solutions** to advance free meal access. If enacted in federal law, these policies would increase food security for all children. California has already:

- **Prevented lunch shaming** by ensuring that a child is not shamed or denied a meal and given an alternative meal when they lack the money for lunch.
- **Ensured that all public schools, including publicly funded charter schools**, provide at least one meal a day to National School Lunch Program eligible K-12 children.

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Citations available at cafoodbanks.org/citations

