

Senate Bill 364

School Meals for All

Senator Nancy Skinner, D-Berkeley

THIS BILL

SB 364 would make school meals available to every public school student without red-tape or paperwork, and provide meals for students when schools are closed. SB 364 will cut school administrative costs, improve learning, help families and support California farmers and food producers.

In California, every child has the right to a free education, regardless of income. Yet, while we know that good nutrition supports classroom learning, schools are required to implement out-of-date and bureaucratic applications to determine financial need before serving a child a meal. Such rules undermine California's ability to prevent hunger, experienced by 1 out of every 5 California child, and undermine our ability to focus on child learning and development in the school setting.

ISSUE

Before the pandemic, to receive a free meal at a California public school, a student would have to:

- Attend a school where more than 40% of students qualify for free meals.
- Live in a household with CalFresh or Medi-Cal recipients.
- Apply for a free meal, verifying that their family income is at or below 130% of the Federal poverty level (FPL).

The only exception to this rule is in the serving of Afterschool Suppers, which were enacted with the passage of AB 626 (Skinner, 2013), which are offered free to all students participating in afterschool programs, regardless of income and without a needs-tested application.

During the pandemic, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) took steps to allow schools to provide a free meal or multiple meals at a school site to any student that needs food. However, the federal waivers that allow for the "Universal Free Meal" program are set to expire at the end of this summer, taking away a critical nutritional resource from children and families as they struggle with the long-term economic impacts of the COVID-19 recession.

Additionally, the California Department of Education and the California Department of Social Services implemented the federal Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program, which allowed the state to provide food benefits to children in need even though classrooms were closed. Despite the success of both of those programs, there is no plan to continue them post-pandemic.

While these essential anti-hunger programs are set to end, California remains one of the states suffering from the highest rate of food-insecurity, despite being one of the most abundant producers of food. The provisions of SB 364 will not only prevent hunger among California students, they also support the state's agriculture and food system economy as well as jobs associated with school meal programs.

SOLUTION

SB 364 seeks to ensure free meals for all school children, support California's food economy and combat child hunger by:

- Ensuring every public school student is served free meals without requiring cumbersome application & verification process.
- Increasing student access to California-grown and freshly prepared food.
- Establishing the Better Out of School Time (BOOST) Nutrition Program, modeled on the federal P-EBT program, to prevent child hunger during regularly scheduled school breaks and emergency school closures.
- Ensuring that info collected from a family for a school meal program can not be sold, and can only be used to maximize California's drawdown of federal anti-hunger funding.

SUPPORT

50 Acterra Action for a Healthy Planet
Agricultural Institute of Marin
Alameda County Community Food Bank
Alameda County Office of Education
American Heart Association
API Forward Movement
Bay Area Community Services
Bay Area Ranchers' Cooperative, INC
California Alternative Payment Program
Association

California Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance
California Association of Student Councils
California Certified Organic Farmers
California School Nurses Organization
California School-based Health Alliance
California Association of Food Banks
CA Teachers Association
CA State Council SEIU
CA School Employees Assoc (CSEA)
Californiahealth+ Advocates
Californians for Pesticide Reform
Center for Ecoliteracy
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Ceres Community Project
Childrens Advocacy Institute
Common Sense
Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County
Culinary Farm at Marin Country Day School, Dolores Huerta Foundation
Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation
Ecology Center, Berkeley
Food for People, The Food Bank for Humboldt County
Food Research & Action Center
Foodcorps
Fresh Approach
Fresno Barrios Unidos
Friends Committee on Legislation of California
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Frog Hollow Farm
GRACE/End Child Poverty CA
Growing the Table
Healthy Schools Campaign
Hunger Action Los Angeles Inc.
Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Los Angeles Food Policy Council
Marin Food Policy Council
Member of CIA Healthy Kids Collaborative
Mt. Diablo Unified School District
Natural Resources Defense Council
Neighborhood Industries
NextGen California
Oakland Unified School District
Office of Kat Taylor
Open Heart Kitchen
Redwood Empire Food Bank
River City Food Bank
Roots of Change
Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services
San Diego Food Bank
San Francisco-Marin Food Bank
San Luis Coastal Unified School District
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County
San Jose Bridge Communities
San Luis Coastal Unified School District
San Mateo County Food Systems Alliance

Sierra Harvest
Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley
Share Our Strength
Stemple Creek Ranch
The Edible Schoolyard Project
The Office of Kat Taylor
The Resource Connection Food Bank
The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
Tomkat Ranch
Union of Concerned Scientists
Eat REAL
Vista Unified School District
Western Center on Law & Poverty
Westside Food Bank

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