

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILY SERVICES (CYF)

Resolution CYF-22-24

MODERNIZING THE CHILD NUTRITION ACT

WHEREAS, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators has a commitment to the food security of all children, and the federal child nutrition programs are critical for our nation's health, economy, and national security;

WHEREAS, regular access to healthy and affordable meals has been proven to be one of the strongest means of improved school performance, improved health, and sound childhood development;

WHEREAS, according to 2020 Census data, black households reported food insecurity rates that were more than twice as high as white households;

WHEREAS, research shows that childhood hunger and food insecurity have a range of negative impacts on the health, academic performance, and overall well-being of children;

WHEREAS, research suggests that older Black students may be more likely to skip meals during the week than White students;

WHEREAS, school nutrition programs offer the opportunity to provide healthy food and improve dietary quality for students who may otherwise not eat;

WHEREAS, school meals can also have a positive impact on grades, absences, and tardiness among students;

WHEREAS, students from Black families are more likely to receive free or reduced-price lunches during the school year and research shows students who receive these meals during the school year are more likely to face food insufficiency in the summer;

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a dramatic spike in the rate of children experiencing hunger and food insecurity, peaking at 18% of families with children reporting their household didn't have enough to eat in December 2020 according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and also created challenges to safely accessing child nutrition programs;

WHEREAS, substantial racial and ethnic disparities in food insecurity exist among parents of school-age children, and Black families experienced significant hardship as a result of the pandemic;

WHEREAS, approximately 4 in 10 families with parents who are Black (40.8%) reported food insecurity in the prior 30 days, almost triple the rate of families with White parents (15.1%);

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WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an ongoing increase in the scope and scale of children experiencing hunger and food insecurity with the most recent estimates from Feeding America showing that 13 million may face hunger in 2021 compared with the all-time low of 11 million in 2019, according to USDA;

WHEREAS, non-congregate meal delivery options were especially critical in distributing meals to children in rural and hard to reach communities, or where transportation challenges make it difficult for programs to distribute meals at a localized site;

WHEREAS, the child nutrition programs are the front line of defense against childhood hunger and food insecurity, promoting healthy eating and providing healthy, nutritious food for the nation's children through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer EBT for Children (SEBTC), Pandemic-EBT, the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC);

WHEREAS, the SEBTC Program reaches children who most need additional food support over summer and school breaks and is proven to reduce food insecurity among children;

WHEREAS, P-EBT, a temporary program providing a grocery benefit to children who have lost access to free and reduced priced meals at school due to COVID-19, has been highly effective at reducing food insecurity;

WHEREAS, CEP program promotes equity and reduces stigma for families, and has been proven to reduce hunger and improve student outcomes;

WHEREAS, a proven barrier to continued participation in the WIC Program is unavailability of remote appointments, short certification periods, and lack of flexibility in food purchasing, ordering, and delivery;

WHEREAS, millions of children benefit from these programs, including the 21.5 million low-income children who participated in the school lunch program and the 12.4 million who participated in the school breakfast program in the 2018-2019 school year, as well as the 6.3 million mothers and children who received food and nutrition education through WIC and 2.8 million children who ate summer meals in 2019;

WHEREAS, the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 has improved the nutritional standards for school nutrition programs and as a result, kids have access to increased fruits, vegetables, and whole grains but less sugars, fats and sodium, and that Congress has the opportunity to ensure that children continue to have access to nutritious and quality meals to help prevent childhood hunger and obesity;

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WHEREAS, Congress has an opportunity to improve and strengthen access to nutrition through the 2021 Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) bill, by making permanent the COVID-19 waiver flexibilities that help to better reach children and by including provisions that would increase access and reach more kids through streamlining, reducing administrative burdens, and providing program flexibility, giving them the access to quality meals that they have during the school year;

WHEREAS, an adequately funded and evidence-based reauthorization bill can reduce childhood hunger and food insecurity in America, help reduce childhood obesity, improve child nutrition and health, and enhance healthy child development and school readiness; allowing children to reach their full potential; and

WHEREAS, Congress has a unique opportunity in the upcoming reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act to improve and promote equitable access and nutrition for millions of children, particularly low-income children.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) urges Congress to protect, strengthen and improve the child nutrition programs through a Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act that builds on the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 to ensure that low-income children continue to have access to nutritious meals throughout the year;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges Congress to streamline and simplify provisions governing the summer meals program in order to reduce administrative burdens, bureaucracies and duplications in program administration and operation during the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges Congress to allow for more flexibility around where children are able to access and eat summer meals, by allowing for non-congregate models in communities where summer meals sites are not available and lowering the threshold required to operate sites open to all children;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges Congress to permanently authorize the operation of the SEBTC program, make program funding mandatory and expand the reach of the program to kids eligible for free or reduced-price school meals in all states, tribal nations and localities in order to close the summer meals gap;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges Congress to permanently authorize the PEBT system beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing authorities to quickly deliver increased nutritional aid during times of crisis;

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges Congress to expand the well- documented benefits of CEP, which allows schools to serve meals at no charge to all students if enough are identified as qualifying for other assistance programs, by lowering the minimum identified student percentage (ISP), increasing the ISP multiplier, expanding direct certification with Medicaid data nationwide, and supporting the improvement of direct certification systems;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL urges Congress to increase the flexibility of WIC appointments through increased access to remote appointments and extended certification periods as well as to support equitable access to the WIC food package through modernization efforts that increase access to online ordering, online purchasing, and delivery;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL supports the enactment of a Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act that ensures low-income children's improved and equitable access to and participation in the child nutrition programs, and, that it includes the policy goals stated above; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate, and other federal and state government officials and agencies as appropriate.

SPONSOR(S): Delegate Regina Boyce (MD), Senator Shevrin Jones (FL), Senator Steven Bradford (CA), and Senator Edward James (LA)

Committee of Jurisdiction: Children, Youth, and Family Services (CYF) Policy Committee

Ratified in Plenary Session: December 2, 2021

Ratification certified by: Representative Billy Mitchell (GA), NBCSL President