

Support Summer Meals Act of 2014

The Summer Meals Act of 2014, S. 2527/H.R. 5012, introduced by Senators Kristin Gillibrand (D-NY) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Reps. Don Young (R-AK) and Rick Larsen (D-WA), would strengthen, protect, and expand access to the Summer Nutrition Programs which help to reduce childhood hunger and combat childhood obesity experienced by low-income children over the summer months, while also supporting educational and enrichment programs that keep children learning, engaged, and safe when school is not in session.

What are the Summer Nutrition Programs?

The Summer Nutrition Programs (the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program) provide federal funding to serve nutritious meals and snacks during summer break when low-income children lose access to free and reduced-price school meals. The meals are served at sites such as summer programs, summer school, parks and recreation centers, Ys, and Boys and Girls Clubs that are located in a low-income area or that serve primarily low-income children. The vast majority of sites offer learning, enrichment, and/or recreational activities in addition to nutritious meals.

How Many Children Benefit from the Summer Nutrition Programs?

In July 2013, nearly three million children ate summer lunch on an average day, reaching only one in seven of the low-income children who rely on school lunch during the school year.

What does the bill propose?

Improve the area eligibility test to allow communities to participate if 40 percent of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Currently, a summer meal site qualifies if 50 percent or more of children in the area qualify for free or reduced-price school meals as defined by school or census data. This threshold keeps many communities with significant numbers of low-income children, but not a high enough concentration of poverty, from participating. In addition, the 50 percent test is inconsistent with federally funded summer programs, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs and Title I, which require at least 40 percent. These important education programs should all be able to provide summer meals.

Allow local government agencies and private nonprofit organizations to feed children year-round through the Summer Food Service Program. Currently, sponsors must apply to and operate both the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) in order to feed children—often the same children—after school and during the summer. This creates duplicative paperwork and confusing administrative rules that discourage participation.

Provide funding for transportation grants to fund innovative approaches and mobile meal trucks. Transportation is one of the biggest barriers to participation, and these grants will increase low-income children's access to summer meals in rural and other under-served areas.

Allow all sites to serve a third meal. Many summer meal sites provide child care to working parents and run all day, but most sites are only able to serve a maximum of two meals. This leaves children without enough nutrition to get through the day or forces sites to use program dollars for food.

How Will the Summer Meals Act Benefit My Community?

Combat childhood hunger and obesity. The Summer Nutrition Programs replace the breakfasts, lunches, after school meals, and snacks that children receive during the school day, giving low-income children access to the healthy meals their bodies need.

Keep children safe, learning, and out of trouble. The meals help draw children into educational, enrichment, and recreational activities which are important tools for combating summer learning loss, reducing juvenile crime and teen pregnancy, and supporting working parents.

Provide states federal child nutrition funding that will create jobs and generate economic activity. The Summer Nutrition Programs bring federal dollars into local communities that must be used to support providing meals, such as to purchase food, pay salaries and cover transportation costs.