

THE TRIBAL NUTRITION IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2015

The Tribal Nutrition Improvement Act of 2015 (TNIA) is a bill introduced in the United States Senate by Senator Tom Udall and co-sponsored by Senator Jon Tester.

The Tribal Nutrition Improvement Act

- **Fights child hunger,**
- **Promotes tribal sovereignty,**
- **Increases tribes' control over child nutrition programs, and**
- **Brings increased federal funding to tribal communities.**

All over the United States, including in sovereign Native nations, children and families rely on federal child nutrition programs. These programs provide free meals to low-income children in school, in day care, in the summer, and after school.

But there are structural problems that make it harder for Native children to access these meals. The TNIA creates solutions to these problems.

Here's how to support the TNIA:

- Call your senator or representative in Congress and ask him or her to co-sponsor this important bill.
- Get a resolution from your tribal government or school board supporting the TNIA.
- Write an editorial for your local paper highlighting Native hunger and explaining the need for the TNIA.

Here's what the TNIA does:

1) Makes it easier for Native schools to feed all of their students for free.

Problem: Native children who participate in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) face a disadvantage in getting free meals at school. One of the best ways to fight hunger in low-income schools is to feed all students for free. Schools can feed all children for free if many of their students are “directly certified,” or automatically signed up for free meals without an application. Children in FDPIR households are eligible for free meals, but most states don’t sign them up automatically.

This means that schools with high populations of students on FDPIR are at a disadvantage in feeding all students for free.

Solution: The TNIA instructs the federal government to look for new ways to feed all children for free in schools on and near reservations. This ends the disadvantage for Native students and their schools.

2) Empowers Native nations to operate child nutrition programs.

Problem: Currently, tribal governments run many federal programs, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)—but federal law does not allow them to run child nutrition programs. If organizations on tribal land want to operate these programs, they have to apply to the state, even if they also have to follow tribal laws about health, safety, and nutrition. Sometimes, they have to apply to two or three separate state governments.

This adds an extra layer of bureaucracy and makes it harder for organizations on tribal land to participate in child nutrition programs.

Solution: The TNIA recognizes the sovereignty of tribal governments and ensures that if they choose, they can take over administration of these vital programs. This will reduce bureaucracy and increase Native students’ access to meals in their own communities.