



September 7, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

We write today to urge you to include Healthy School Meals for All in the upcoming budget reconciliation package, or other “must-pass” legislation. Offering free meals to all students is an important step forward in the fight to achieve racial equity and would help mitigate the nutrition and economic cliff millions of families will face if free school meals for all ends after the 2021-2022 school year.

In considering the disproportionate levels of food insecurity faced by Black students before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the significant educational, health, and mental health benefits of school meals, maintaining access to Healthy School Meals for All would have a positive impact on Black families and children across the country.

By passing legislation to continue providing Healthy School Meals for All, we can alleviate the disproportionate childhood food insecurity levels of Black children and continue a long tradition of federal government support for those most vulnerable.<sup>1</sup> This disparity existed prior to the pandemic but has been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19. In 2019, USDA reported that 23% of Black households with children and 17% of Latinx households with children were food insecure, compared to only 10% of white households with children.<sup>2</sup> During the pandemic, this disparity only increased, as the Urban Institute reported that food insecurity among Black households with children increased to 40%.<sup>3</sup> School meals have proven critical in alleviating childhood food insecurity amid the pandemic, in no small part because of waivers allowing schools to serve meals free of charge to all students regardless of their income level.

In addition to being a key support in alleviating childhood food insecurity among Black students, federal child nutrition programs, made available via programs such as the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (EBT), can also help reduce racial disparities in health and education. School meals reduce childhood hunger, decrease childhood overweight and obesity, improve child nutrition and wellness, enhance child development and school readiness, and support learning, attendance, and behavior. Maintaining access to Healthy School Meals for All students will ensure that every child has access to the wide ranging educational and health benefits of school meals.

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<sup>1</sup> See CRS Report [R46234](#), *School Meals and Other Child Nutrition Programs: Background and Funding*, April 2021.

<sup>2</sup> *Household Food Security in the United States in 2019*. USDA Economic Research Service. September 2019. Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/99282/err-275.pdf?v=4232.8>

<sup>3</sup> *Forty Percent of Black and Hispanic Parents of School-Age Children Are Food Insecure*. Urban Institute. December 2020. Available at: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/forty-percent-black-and-hispanic-parents-school-age-children-are-food-insecure>

Again, we urge inclusion of this critical program in the upcoming reconciliation package, or other “must-pass” legislation. As we continue to work to heal our nation in the aftermath of the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism, now is the time to maintain Healthy School Meals for All as a key educational support to ensure that Black students have access to the key nutrition they need to thrive inside and outside the classroom.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joyce Beatty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joyce Beatty  
Chairwoman  
Congressional Black Caucus