

Support the Access to Healthy Food for Young Children Act of 2021

The Access to Healthy Food for Young Children Act of 2021, introduced by Senator Robert Casey (D-PA), would strengthen and expand the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The bill proposes many positive changes that would yield myriad benefits to the children and families that depend on CACFP for the healthy meals and snacks that the program provides.

What is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)?

CACFP provides funding for nutritious meals and snacks served to 4.2 million children in child care centers, family child care homes, and afterschool programs. CACFP ensures that children in child care receive a nutritious diet and learn good eating habits. Unfortunately, under the current system, CACFP meals and snacks are out of reach for millions of children in child care.

What does the bill propose?

Allow an additional CACFP meal service (typically a supper or snack) in full-day child care. Child care settings with eight or more hours between the first meal service and the beginning of the fourth meal service would be eligible to serve an additional meal or snack.

Increase CACFP reimbursements for child care centers and family child care providers by 10 cents for each meal and snack to improve nutrition and stem participation declines. Increasing the availability and consumption of fruits and vegetables, whole-grain foods, and lower-fat dairy products among young children in child care is absolutely essential to improve development, health, and prevent obesity.

Allow annual eligibility for proprietary (for-profit) child care centers to streamline program operations. Currently, these child care centers are required to document institutional eligibility every month rather than the annual eligibility allowed for other centers and homes.

Improve the area eligibility test by allowing family child care home providers to receive the higher Tier I reimbursement if 40 percent of the children in the neighborhood are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Allocate \$5 million in funding to support the new CACFP healthy meal patterns, including best practices to increase consumption of vegetables, fruits, whole-grain foods, and healthy beverages, and eliminate the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

Create a CACFP Community Eligibility Provision pilot to allow child care centers to participate in CACFP without collecting income applications or enrollment forms. Community eligibility relies on direct certification and categorical eligibility to establish a claiming percentage instead of information from income applications. This has been a successful mechanism in low-income schools.

Improve the cost of living adjustment for child care home reimbursement rates to reflect more accurately the real costs to providers. The Consumer Price Index for Food Away From Home, the cost of living adjustment that has worked well for centers, will be the new cost of living adjustment for family child care homes. The Consumer Price Index for Food at Home, which is the cost of living adjustment currently used for CACFP homes, has not kept up with the cost of providing CACFP meals.

Establish an option allowing child centers to collect income applications every four years rather than every year. Child centers that serve predominantly low-income children (at least 50 percent of children qualify for free or reduced-price meal rates) will be able to lock in a blended rate, without collecting additional annual income applications, for four years.

Direct USDA to reduce unnecessary and duplicative paperwork resulting from federal and state regulations and record-keeping requirements. The provision identifies key areas to address, including streamlining and modernizing applications, monitoring, and auditing, eliminating the use of enrollment forms, allowing the use of direct certification in all states, and requiring states to accept digital forms, digitized and electronic signatures, and electronic records as documentation. USDA will continue the CACFP paperwork reduction workgroup.

Learn more about this legislation and actions you can take to ensure that these provisions are part of the final child nutrition bill later this year by going to [FRAC's Child Nutrition Reauthorization webpage](#).