

Support the Summer Meals Act of 2021

The Summer Meals Act of 2021 ([S. 1170](#) / [H.R. 783](#)), introduced by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Representatives Don Young (R-AK) and Rick Larsen (D-WA), would increase the reach of the Summer Nutrition Programs. The Summer Nutrition Programs help close the summer nutrition gap and support educational and enrichment programs that keep children learning, engaged, and safe when school is out.

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 school meals. The meals are served at sites such as summer schools, parks and recreation centers, YMCAs, and Boys & Girls Clubs located in geographic areas where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals or that serve primarily low-income children. In July 2019, [nearly 3 million](#) children ate summer lunch on an average day, reaching only 1 in 7 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 are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The current 50 percent threshold prevents many communities with significant numbers of low-income children, but not a high enough concentration of poverty, from participating. Lowering the eligibility test from [50 to 40 percent](#) would improve children's access to summer meals in every state, particularly in rural areas. In addition, the 50 percent test is inconsistent with other federal education summer funding, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs, which require 40 percent or more.

Allow local government agencies and private nonprofit organizations to feed children year-round through the Summer Food Service Program. Currently, sponsors must operate both the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program 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. By streamlining the Summer Food Service Program and the Afterschool Meal Program, sponsors would be able to operate one program year-round.

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 underserved areas.

Allow all sites to serve a third meal. Many summer meal sites run all day, thereby providing child care for working parents, but most sites can only serve a maximum of two meals a day. This leaves children without adequate nutrition to get through the day or forces sites to spend program dollars on food.

S. 1170 includes an additional provision to support meal service in disaster situations. This provision would allow USDA to waive the congregate feeding requirement when a disaster situation is declared by a governor; currently, USDA only has this authority if the president declares a disaster situation.

How Will the Summer Meals Act Benefit Communities?

Combat childhood hunger and obesity. The Summer Nutrition Programs provide healthy meals to replace the breakfasts, lunches, and afterschool meals and snacks that children receive during the school year.

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 program costs (e.g., food purchases, salaries, transportation expenses).