

# SCHOOL MEALS SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND LEARNING

## Proposed Cuts to School Meals Would Worsen Childhood Hunger, Hurt Struggling Families, and Create Unnecessary Burdens for **501** Schools in **GEORGIA**

House Budget Committee Chair Jodey Arrington (R-TX) has proposed \$12 billion in cuts to school meals programs for the 2025 budget reconciliation. The proposals would substantially decrease the number of schools eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and make it harder for eligible families to apply for free or reduced-price school meals at non-CEP schools. Combined, these proposals would reduce students' access to school meals and raise families' grocery bills, while imposing unnecessary and burdensome paperwork requirements on schools in **GEORGIA**.

### What Is Community Eligibility?

CEP allows schools serving large numbers of children from families with low incomes to offer school meals at no charge to all students. Rather than relying on school meal applications to determine a school's federal reimbursements, CEP schools are reimbursed based on the share of students from families with low incomes, as determined through a data-matching process that identifies students' participation in other means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Currently, schools can adopt CEP if at least 25 percent of students receive these benefits.

### CONGRESS MUST REJECT ANY PROPOSAL TO WEAKEN CEP

Chair Arrington's proposal would increase the CEP eligibility threshold for schools from **25** percent to **60** percent of students identified as receiving benefits. This would cut over 24,000 schools nationwide from participating in CEP and undermine the health and learning of more than **12 million children**.

### Community Eligibility Supports Students, Families, and Schools

CEP is a win for students, families, and schools. CEP gives all students access to the nutritious school breakfasts and lunches they need to be well-nourished and ready to learn, while reducing the stigma often present in school cafeterias when schools have to track students' eligibility for free, reduced-price, and paid meals. **When students have access to free meals at school, families have lower grocery bills and more money in their household budgets to help make ends meet.**

CEP has grown in popularity since first becoming available nationwide over a decade ago. In the 2023–2024 school year, one out of every two schools that operated the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participated in CEP. CEP makes school meal operations more efficient and effective: It eliminates the administrative burden associated with school meal applications, strengthens program integrity, and supports school nutrition finances by eliminating school meal debt and increasing participation in school breakfast and lunch, which allows for economies of scale.



IN 2023–2024 SCHOOL YEAR

**892** SCHOOLS

in **GEORGIA** — which represents **40** percent of schools that participate in the school lunch program — adopted CEP, reaching **523,175** children each school day.

### The proposed cuts to school meals would **increase hardships** for children and families across **GEORGIA**:



**501**

**schools in GEORGIA** would no longer be able to provide free school meals through CEP and would have to reinstate meal applications.



**107**

**school districts in GEORGIA**, listed on the reverse page, would be affected.



**320,818**

**GEORGIA** children attend schools that would no longer be able to offer meals at no charge to all students through CEP.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than reducing access to school meals, **CONGRESS SHOULD INVEST IN CEP** and reduce barriers to applying for free or reduced-price school meals, so families can afford groceries and children have access to the nutritious meals they need to thrive in school and beyond.

The following table identifies the school districts in **GEORGIA**, and the number of schools and children within each district that would lose access to CEP if Congress increases the eligibility threshold to 60 percent of students identified as receiving benefits.

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
APPLING COUNTY	4	2311
ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS	16	8651
ATLANTA YOUTH ACADEMIES, INC.	1	143
BACON COUNTY	3	1475
BALDWIN COUNTY	4	2915
BEN HILL COUNTY	6	3008
BERRIEN COUNTY	3	2173
BIBB COUNTY	15	10325
BLECKLEY COUNTY	2	1319
BRANTLEY COUNTY	7	3407
BROOKS COUNTY	3	1008
BULLOCH COUNTY	5	2904
BURKE COUNTY	1	1137
BUTTS COUNTY	3	2485
CALHOUN COUNTY	1	140
CANDLER COUNTY	4	2146
CHATTAHOOCHEE COUNTY	2	504
CLARKE COUNTY	18	10729
CLAYTON COUNTY	36	28641
CLINCH COUNTY	3	1244
COFFEE COUNTY	7	5031
COLQUITT COUNTY	7	6598
COOK COUNTY	4	3068
CRAWFORD COUNTY	4	1553
CRISP COUNTY	1	1050
DECATUR COUNTY	3	2880
DEKALB COUNTY	22	19054
DODGE COUNTY	5	2705
DOOLY COUNTY	2	353

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
DOUGHERTY COUNTY	5	3203
DUBLIN CITY	2	1228
EARLY COUNTY	1	515
ECHOLS COUNTY	2	895
ELBERT COUNTY	3	1972
EMANUEL COUNTY	2	1074
EVANS COUNTY	2	873
FULTON COUNTY	13	10176
GRADY COUNTY	7	4463
GREENE COUNTY	1	426
GRIFFIN SPALDING COUNTY	1	467
GRIFFIN-SPALDING COUNTY	9	5453
HARALSON COUNTY	7	3442
HOUSTON COUNTY	11	9186
IRWIN COUNTY	3	1632
JEFF DAVIS COUNTY	4	2231
JEFFERSON COUNTY	3	1428
JENKINS COUNTY	1	328
JOHNSON COUNTY	2	528
JONES COUNTY	3	1615
KIPP SFA	8	3790
LANIER COUNTY	3	1683
LAURENS COUNTY	7	5883
LOWNDES COUNTY	4	2605
MACON COUNTY	1	324
MARION COUNTY	1	695
MCDUFFIE COUNTY	3	2122
MCINTOSH COUNTY	3	1325
MERIWETHER COUNTY	4	1124

The following table identifies the school districts in **GEORGIA**, and the number of schools and children within each district that would lose access to CEP if Congress increases the eligibility threshold to 60 percent of students identified as receiving benefits.

(continued)

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
MILLER COUNTY	3	780
MITCHELL COUNTY	1	364
MONTGOMERY COUNTY	3	912
MURRAY COUNTY	5	2094
MUSCOGEE COUNTY	17	11017
NEWTON COUNTY	14	11360
PEACH COUNTY	5	2914
PELHAM CITY	2	708
PIERCE COUNTY	4	2588
POLK COUNTY	8	6654
PULASKI COUNTY	2	701
PUTNAM COUNTY	3	2190
QUITMAN COUNTY	1	121
RANDOLPH COUNTY	1	237
RICHMOND COUNTY	24	15204
ROME CITY	2	1125
SEMINOLE COUNTY	2	1339
STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS II - FURLOW CHARTER	1	587
STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS II- ATLANTA SMART ACADEMY	1	213
STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS II- ATLANTA UNBOUND ACADEMY	1	190
STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS II- DEKALB BRILLIANCE ACADEMY	1	255
STATE CHARTER SCHOOLS- IVY PREPARATORY ACADEMY, INC	1	459
STEPHENS COUNTY	5	2728
STEWART COUNTY	1	111
SUMTER COUNTY	1	1036

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
TATTNALL COUNTY	5	3599
TAYLOR COUNTY	2	625
TELFAIR COUNTY	3	748
THOMAS COUNTY	6	5743
THOMASTON-UPSON COUNTY	4	4086
THOMASVILLE CITY	2	1286
TIFT COUNTY	7	6037
TOOMBS COUNTY	3	2060
TREUTLEN COUNTY	2	984
TROUP COUNTY	5	4131
TURNER COUNTY	1	342
TWIGGS COUNTY	2	580
VALDOSTA CITY	4	4848
VIDALIA CITY	3	1615
WARE COUNTY	8	5231
WARREN COUNTY	1	181
WASHINGTON COUNTY	3	2157
WAYNE COUNTY	7	4637
WEBSTER COUNTY	1	66
WHEELER COUNTY	2	454
WILCOX COUNTY	2	610
WILKES COUNTY	3	893
WILKINSON COUNTY	4	1346
WORTH COUNTY	4	3029