

# 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 **598** Schools in **TENNESSEE**

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 **TENNESSEE**.

### 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

**886** SCHOOLS

in **TENNESSEE** — which represents **50** percent of schools that participate in the school lunch program — adopted CEP, reaching **385,722** children each school day.

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



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



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



**280,726** **TENNESSEE** 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 **TENNESSEE**, 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
ALAMO CITY	1	0
ATHENS CITY	3	457
BEDFORD COUNTY	12	6691
BELLS CITY	1	0
BLEDSON COUNTY	4	1482
BRADLEY COUNTY	11	3378
CANNON COUNTY	5	1684
CARTER COUNTY	11	3887
CHATTANOOGA CHARTER SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE	1	29
CHATTANOOGA GIRLS LEADERSHIP ACD.	1	354
CLAIBORNE COUNTY	8	3110
CLAY COUNTY	3	1079
CLEVELAND CITY	7	3093
COCKE COUNTY	8	3097
CROCKETT COUNTY	2	0
CUMBERLAND COUNTY	9	4682
DAVIDSON COUNTY	69	38156
DAYTON CITY	1	797
DEKALB COUNTY	5	2837
ELIZABETHTON CITY	2	877
ETOWAH CITY	1	347
EXPLORE COMMUNITY SCHOOL	1	538
FAYETTE COUNTY	4	2216
FAYETTEVILLE CITY	3	1164
FENTRESS COUNTY	4	1762

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
FRANKLIN COUNTY	4	1456
GENESIS LEARNING CENTERS	4	148
GESTALT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS	3	1360
GILES COUNTY	8	3522
GREENEVILLE CITY	5	439
GRUNDY COUNTY	6	1787
HAMILTON COUNTY	20	11507
HARDEMAN COUNTY	8	3012
HARDIN COUNTY	6	2980
HAWKINS COUNTY	10	2257
HAYWOOD COUNTY	3	1586
HUMBOLDT CITY	1	429
JACKSON COUNTY	1	443
JACKSON-MADISON COUNTY	15	8840
JACKSON-MADISON COUNTY	1	0
JOHNSON COUNTY	4	1611
JOURNEY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS	2	976
KINGSPORT CITY	5	1344
KNOX COUNTY	21	10336
LAKE COUNTY	1	204
LAUDERDALE COUNTY	5	2278
LAWRENCE COUNTY	12	6260
MACON COUNTY	7	3297
MARION COUNTY	7	3001
MCMINN COUNTY	9	4906

The following table identifies the school districts in **TENNESSEE**, 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
MCNAIRY COUNTY	8	3594
MEIGS COUNTY	4	1633
MEMPHIS RISE ACADEMY	1	768
MILLINGTON	3	2444
MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY AT HIGHLAND PARK	1	0
MORGAN COUNTY	6	2749
MURFREESBORO CITY	8	5213
OAK RIDGE CITY	1	376
PARIS SSD	2	1020
PEREA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	1	282
POLK COUNTY	6	2076
PUTNAM COUNTY	7	2760
REPUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS	2	932
RHEA COUNTY	7	4125
RICHARD CITY SSD	1	0
ROANE COUNTY	6	2441
ROBERTSON COUNTY	8	3014

School District	Schools Impacted	Children Impacted
ROCKETSHIP EDUCATION	1	329
SCOTT COUNTY	6	2184
SEQUATCHIE COUNTY	3	1953
SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS	122	69701
SMITHSON CRAIGHEAD ACADEMY	1	346
STEWART COUNTY	3	456
SULLIVAN COUNTY	2	856
TIPTON COUNTY	5	778
TROUSDALE COUNTY	3	1419
TULLAHOMA CITY	3	1064
UNION COUNTY	7	1952
VAN BUREN COUNTY	2	797
WARREN COUNTY	8	5183
WEAKLEY COUNTY	7	1562
WEST CARROLL CO SSD	2	611
WHITE COUNTY	6	2412