



Support the Military Dependents School Meal Eligibility Act

The school nutrition programs are critical for ensuring access to nutritious food and supporting academic success. The Military Dependents School Meal Eligibility Act (H.R. 8534), introduced by Representative Mike Levin (D-CA), would ensure access to free and reduced-price school meals for eligible children of active duty service members. [View the full list of co-sponsors here.](#)

What Are the School Nutrition Programs?

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) provide millions of children across the country with a nutritious breakfast and lunch every school day. Children qualify for free or reduced-price school meals based on their family's income. NSLP and SBP serve about 22 million and 12 million children from households with low incomes an average school day, respectively.

Military Dependents: What Does the Bill Propose?

Direct certification of military children for free or reduced-price school meals and exclusion of housing allowances in the income determination. The Department of Defense would compile a list of children who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals based on their family size and military income for the purposes of direct certification. Almost all children of E-1, or entry-level, active service members would be directly certified for free or reduced-price school meals, as well as many children of service members up through ranks E-6.

Children in families whose military income falls below 130 percent of the federal poverty line would qualify for free school meals, and those whose military income falls between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty line would qualify for reduced-price school meals. The Department of Defense would then provide this information to the Secretary of Agriculture and local school districts (including Department of Defense schools) to allow them to be directly certified for free or reduced-price school meals.

How Will the Military Dependents School Meal Eligibility Act Benefit Communities?

Reduce food insecurity among military families. There is a significant gap between the number of military families that report food insecurity and those who are able to access nutrition assistance programs.¹ By gaining access to free and reduced-price school breakfasts and lunches, this bill will ensure that children in military families have access to school breakfast and lunch each school day, and help reduce the household's food costs.

Improve the health and academic outcomes of military children. [Research](#) has shown the vital importance of school meals in improving children's health, learning, and well-being.

Support community eligibility in schools that serve a high proportion of military families.

Community eligibility schools offer free meals to all students. Under community eligibility, a school's eligibility and its funding are based on the percentage of directly certified students. The Act could help increase the number of children in military families who are able to attend community eligibility schools.

¹ The Military-Baylor Graduate Program and the Brooke Army Medical Center reported food insecurity among military families at 14 percent in 2018, whereas the American Community Survey states that only 1.5 percent of the active force receive nutrition benefits. <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/time-series/acsbr.All.html/>