

ABOUT THE BILL

SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL (H.603/S.261)



The Time is Now.

Today in Massachusetts, 1 in 5 households with children are food insecure, with Black, Latino, and multiracial families disproportionately impacted. Inflation and recent public health crises have shed light on this situation.

However, we know this was **always** a crisis. Too many people in our state have struggled to meet their most basic of human needs – food – for a long time. And kids have always been one of the groups most impacted. We can end childhood hunger start with what happens in schools.

The Important Role of School Meals in Solving Childhood Hunger.

School meals are a critical source of nutrition for many children, helping them learn and be active in the short term, and thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in the long term. School meals also establish lifelong healthy eating habits that can reduce the cases and severity of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, along with the cost associated with these diseases.

School meals can account for over half of a child's daily calories. These are children who might not otherwise have reliable access to healthy food at home. But right now, more than half of students who could benefit from school meals aren't eating them. While there are many reasons for this, two of the biggest barriers that stop children from participating in school meals are the cost of purchasing meals and the stigma of being singled out as needing a school meal.

WHAT WOULD THE BILL DO?

- Require all schools to make school breakfast and lunch available to all students at no charge to the student or their family.
- Require that the cost of providing school meals be covered by a combination of federal reimbursement and state funding.
- Encourage schools to maximize federal dollars by supporting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach to families, qualifying more students for federally reimbursed free meals.



UNDER SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL

**more than
80,000 additional
students**

ate school lunch daily.

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How Do We Ensure All Students Have Access to School Meals?

Massachusetts must guarantee school meals for all! Also known as universal school meals, this policy would allow every student who wants or needs a school breakfast or lunch to receive meals at no cost to their family. Under proposed legislation, the cost would be covered by the existing National School Lunch Program federal reimbursement combined with a supplemental state reimbursement.

With this policy, we choose to imagine a new system. One without paperwork to show a family's income; one without meal debt; one without stigma. One that is equitable. A system where the focus is squarely on feeding kids quality school meals.

CEP and Provision 2

Schools can opt into serving universal free meals through available federal provisions, most commonly the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision II. Only schools and districts with a demonstrated level of need can adopt CEP, while all schools are eligible to participate in Provision II. The details of each are different, but in both cases, the local district is often still required to cover a portion of the cost of meals, except in the case of the highest need districts. This can make it financially challenging or prohibitive for districts to adopt universal meals without additional resources.

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To get involved or to learn more, visit FeedKidsMA.org