



Strengthening the Child and Adult Care Food Program in the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization:

S. 2749 and H.R. 4402, the Access to Nutritious Meals for Young Children Act of 2009

For many children, the child care program they attend is their primary source of food. Good nutrition in the first years of life is essential for early brain development. Healthy meals lead to healthy child development and healthy children. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) makes a significant difference in the ability of child care centers, family child care homes, and Head Start and Early Head Start programs to offer wholesome and nutritious meals. With the growth in child poverty, increasing food prices, the link between children's health to obesity, as well as overall food insecurity among families and communities, CACFP is an essential support to families and children.

Mealtime in child care programs is a time for learning, and child care providers are proud of the good meals they serve. Meal service is a major part of program budgets and families are relying on meals served to their children in CACFP more than before. Rising food and fuel costs are making healthy meals and snacks more expensive. Child care programs have no extra room in their budgets to make up for low reimbursement rates. Providers find it challenging to afford to meet CACFP's requirements. And, there are also millions of children in child care settings who could benefit from CACFP but are currently unserved.

About the Access to Nutritious Meals for Young Children Act:

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY 21) introduced legislation that would take a significant step forward in improving access to nutritious meals in child care. Specifically, the legislation calls for:

- Increasing CACFP Reimbursement Rates for child care centers and family child care homes by 20 cents per meal and 10 cents per snack to help offset the high cost of nutritious foods.
- Adding a third meal or snack option for children in child care, helping to cover the costs of food for children who are in care for longer hours while their parents patch together work opportunities.
- Expanding CACFP family child care home Area Eligibility from 50 percent to 40 percent, to make more family child care providers eligible for the higher levels of reimbursement.
- Increasing the Administrative Reimbursement Rate for CACFP sponsoring organizations by \$5 per family child care home per month and protecting rates from negative cost of living adjustments.
- Streamlining and simplifying program and paperwork requirements for states, sponsoring organizations, child care providers and parents.

Support S. 2749 and H.R. 4402 and include its provisions in the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization!

CACFP Background

Created in 1968, the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) serves more than two million children in child care settings each day. The program provided 1.85 billion meals and snacks in 2007. Program participation by child care centers has more than doubled — from 20,000 to over 47,000 centers — in the last 20 years. This increase is due in part to the ability of for-profit child care programs to participate in CACFP. In the 2004 reauthorization, a pilot initiative was made permanent, allowing for-profit centers that serve at least 25% low-income children to enroll in CACFP. Regardless of the tax status of a child care program, children who are hungry need to be served and CACFP makes a huge difference to these providers. Two thousand Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC) member child care centers participate in CACFP, and serve nearly 200,000 children with support from the program. With centers in 48 states, and more than 2 million meals and snacks served each month, ECEC members are experts in the implementation of CACFP.

However, participation from family child care providers is dropping rapidly due to increased costs and complex eligibility requirements established in 1996. And, across settings, there are millions more children who could be served with expanded access to CACFP.

CACFP is profoundly important to America's children—both in terms of the number of children it serves and in terms of its positive impact on children and their development. **CACFP is important not just because it provides food but because it provides the right foods.** The healthy food that is made available is essential to low-income children. In addition, through in-home visits, group classes, and ongoing assistance and support, CACFP-sponsoring organizations and state agencies teach child care providers not just the importance of good nutrition but also offer practical advice and guidance on serving healthy and nutritious food.

CACFP makes a difference to children, parents, and providers:

- CACFP helps children by ensuring they receive healthy meals, which leads to healthy development. Mealtime is learning time and healthy choices last a lifetime.
- CACFP helps parents by providing healthy meals for their children, informing them about good nutritional practice, and keeping their child care costs down.
- CACFP helps providers offset the high cost of food, offers helpful training and resources on child nutrition, and provides monitoring and support.

There are challenges, however:

- Currently, the reimbursement rates for food in CACFP do not meet the rising prices of nutritious foods.
- Many of the children in child care are there for three meals per day. But CACFP only reimburses for two meals and a snack. Young children eat small portions and eat more frequently. Providers may offer a second snack, breakfast, or dinner because children need these meals, but this is increasingly difficult on a program's limited budget.
- There is a great deal of paperwork involved in CACFP. It takes time and resources that staff could be spending with the young children.

***For more information or to schedule a visit to a child care program in your Congressional district, please contact Mary Beth Salomone, Policy Director of the Early Care and Education Consortium
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