



## Strengthen the Child and Adult Care Food Program 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. However, participation from family child care providers is dropping rapidly due to increased costs and complex eligibility requirements established in 1996.

**For many children, the child care program they attend is their primary source of food.** Preschool children often receive 75 to 80 percent of their nutritional intake in their child care setting. Good nutrition in the first years of life is essential for early brain development. Healthy meals lead to healthy child development and healthy children. CACFP makes a significant difference in the ability of child care centers, family child care homes, 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.

### CACFP Makes a Difference!

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 enough 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 nutrition practice, and keeping their child care costs down.
- CACFP helps providers with the high cost of food, offers helpful training and resources on child nutrition, as well as 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.

## **Strengthen CACFP through the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization**

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. Over the last eleven years, there has been a 27 percent drop in the number of CACFP-sponsoring organizations and in the number of family child care homes participating in CACFP. There are also providers currently participating who could better serve children with additional support. A well-conceived reauthorization bill can help to reduce hunger, reduce the number of children who are overweight or obese, improve child nutrition and health, and enhance child development and school readiness.

### **We urge Congress to make improvements to CACFP to increase access to nutritional meals and snacks in child care, Head Start and Early Head Start programs:**

- **Increase CACFP reimbursements for meals and snacks to reflect the increased costs of meeting the Dietary Guidelines.**
- **Allow CACFP to offer the option of an additional food service (another meal or another snack) for children in child care, as the program used to do.**
- **Reduce the threshold for the percentage of children in an area who must be in low-income families for a family child care provider to be eligible for higher reimbursements for all of the children in his or her program (area eligibility) from 50 percent to 40 percent.**
- **Reduce the paperwork burden of CACFP.**
- **Increase the payments to CACFP sponsors who support providers in the states.**
- **Improve nutritional quality by:**
  - **requiring lower fat milk (as appropriate based on children's ages according to the Dietary Guidelines)**
  - **making water available to children, as nutritionally appropriate, throughout the day including at meal time.**

*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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