



ASSEMBLY BILL 2595
 California Summer Caregiver Meal Pilot Program
 ASSEMBLYWOMAN
Luz Rivas



SUMMARY

If children from food-insecure homes are going hungry, it is almost certain that their parents or caregivers are also experiencing a deprivation of nourishment. This is especially true when school sites are closed during the summer months. Families have to supplement meals their children would normally receive during the school year.

AB 2595 seeks to combat household hunger during the summer by allowing public libraries that provide children with meals also to provide participating parents and caregivers with those meals.

BACKGROUND

In 2022, California became the first state to implement a statewide Universal Meals Program for schoolchildren. California’s Universal Meals Program (Universal Meals) provides free breakfast and lunch for all students throughout the school year. A 2023 Sacramento Bee article chronicled a Teacher’s Aide (TA) at A.M. Winn Elementary in the Sacramento City Unified School District. The TA notes that the universal meal program provides much-needed financial relief for her since she is on a strict budget. She has two daughters who utilize the universal meal programs, where she is able to save \$150 on her grocery bill per week during the school year. This provides much-needed relief in how she budgets for the family.

According to October 2023 data from the US Census Household Pulse survey, 28% of households with children in California are food insecure, with deep disparities for Black (49%) and Latine (33%) households. The California Department of Education estimates that over 225,000 K-12 students experienced homelessness in the 2022-23 academic year. If these students are experiencing homelessness or living on the brink of homelessness, these households are likely food insecure and experiencing hunger.

During the summer, low-income households spend more on groceries as their children lose access to free meals at school. Parents and caregivers from food-insecure households who depend on free school meals for their children become hard-pressed to financially compensate for the lack of meals when their children are home.

PROBLEM

Students and their families become increasingly vulnerable to hunger during the summer months. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) supports meals for children through their Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), a voluntary program for schools, libraries, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, and government agencies to host and provide free meals to children ages 18 and under.

Currently, SFSP mandates that only children and teens aged 18 and younger are eligible to receive free meals that are USDA-reimbursable. Since parent meals are not allowable under program guidelines, it can be complicated for them when they themselves are hungry and cannot receive food. Many directors want to feed hungry parents but are not able to do so. While some schools offer parent meals at a reduced price, sometimes even the reduced price is unaffordable. The program can be a difficult sell for parents to take the time, especially if they are working, to bring their children to a short, thirty-minute meal that they cannot eat themselves.

In recent years, several communities in California have piloted Summer Meal Program sites to offer meals to caregivers along with their children. These pilot programs have successfully addressed food insecurity for the whole family. Not only do these summer food and programs help children gain access to nutritious meals, but they also combat food insecurity, promote healthy child development, and remove the trauma caused by having little or no access to food.

SOLUTION

AB 2595 will create a state-funded Summer Food Service Pilot Program located at public libraries to serve meals to parents and caregivers of children who utilize the federal summer meal program. By providing parents with meals, we will be able to increase the participation rate of students in these programs, thereby reducing household hunger.

This bill will also develop and provide guidance for program operators participating in the federal program on how to serve parents and caregivers a meal at summer meal program sites.

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