

Baldwin campaign: U.S. Sen. Baldwin joins 32 colleagues pushing for extension of meal waivers to feed hungry kids ahead of benefit expiration

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin joined 32 of her Senate colleagues in a push to extend child nutrition waivers ahead of their expiration and enact a robust set of child nutrition priorities in any upcoming legislative vehicles. As school summer break is already underway in many states, it is vital that Congress extends and expands these programs as low-income families are facing a steep benefits cliff when the waivers expire on June 30, 2022. Specifically, in the letter, the Senators call to extend child nutrition waivers, create a nationwide Summer EBT program, and expand community eligibility (CEP), a flexible meal service option for school districts in low-income areas. These provisions are critical to fighting child hunger and food insecurity.

“The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the child nutrition programs and the role they play in keeping hunger at bay for millions of children across the country. As schools close for summer across the country, families will soon lose access to free school meals and be faced with the prospect of increased food insecurity, weight gain, and learning disruptions,” **said the senators.** “As Congress develops legislation to support families impacted by high food costs, we must help ease the burden of these challenges and ensure that these child nutrition programs can fully meet children’s nutritional needs while they are at school, afterschool and summer programs, and childcare.”

“More must be done to fuel children’s health and learning as millions of families continue to struggle with the fallout of COVID-19. Extending the child nutrition waivers, expanding community eligibility, and creating a nationwide Summer EBT program are surefire ways for our nation’s children to have access to the nutrition they need to grow and thrive in the classroom and beyond,” **said Luis Guardia, president of the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)**. “We call on Congress to act quickly and include these provisions in any upcoming legislative vehicle. Hungry children can’t wait.”

“In a typical year, Boys & Girls Clubs across the country serve 95 million meals and snacks to kids at no cost. Clubs also continually adapt to support the needs of communities during times of crisis including during the peak of the pandemic, providing more than 24 million meals to nearly a half million families nationwide,” **said Jim Clark, president and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of America**. “Extending the child nutrition waivers is critical to support the essential needs of kids, families, and communities still recovering from the economic and social impacts of the last two years. We urge Congress to make child nutrition and hunger a priority by extending the waiver authority and investing in programs that keep youth healthy, safe, and learning.”

“Summer is underway and YMCAs across the country are working to get healthy meals to every child in need. This summer, only 1 in 7 eligible children will have access to these meals, and Congress’ unwillingness to extend child nutrition waivers beyond June 30 is hampering our ability to provide meals when kids need them most,” **said Suzanne McCormick, President and CEO of YMCA of the USA**. “We need to be able to use every possible tool to feed kids this summer, so the recommendations outlined by Senator Gillibrand and her colleagues cannot be passed soon enough. We are hopeful Congress works to enact these provisions, which will help ensure that every child has a summer free of hunger.”

The letter was led by Senator Gillibrand (D-NY) and also signed by Senators by Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Bob Casey (D-PA), Angus King (I-ME), Tina Smith (D-MN), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Jack Reed (D-RI), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Mark Warner (D-VA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Ed Markey (D-MA), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Gary Peters (D-MI), Tim Kaine (D-VA),

Jeffrey Merkley (D-OR), and Chris Murphy (D-CT).

This letter is endorsed by Food Research & Action Center, YMCA of the USA, Afterschool Alliance, Boys & Girls Club of America, Feeding America, School Nutrition Association, American Heart Association, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, First Focus Campaign for Children, MomsRising, Center for Science in the Public Interest, National Parent Teacher Association, National Farm to School Network, School Superintendents Association, Save the Children, National Education Association, National Center for Health Research, Healthy Food America, Food Corps, Community Food Advocates, National CACFP Association, Society of Behavioral Medicine, Center for Food Equity & Economic Development, California Association of Food Banks, Healthy Schools Campaign, Voices for Georgia's Children, and Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network.

The full letter can be found [here](#) or below:

Dear Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy,

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the child nutrition programs, and the role they play in keeping hunger at bay for millions of children across the country. As schools closed across the country, families faced the same challenges they face every summer when they lose access to free school meals: increased food insecurity, weight gain, and learning disruptions.

As the Senate develops legislation to support families being impacted by high food costs and provide pandemic relief, we ask that it include the following three things in any upcoming packages to help ensure that the child nutrition programs are able to support recovery from the impact of the pandemic. School children have to have access to the nutrition they need to grow and thrive while they are at school and during the summer. These provisions will also set the stage for a much stronger Child Nutrition Reauthorization that can take additional steps to ensure that the child nutrition programs are able to fully meet children's nutritional needs while they are at school, afterschool and summer programs, and in childcare.

- **Extend the Child Nutrition Waivers.** The waiver authority that we provided the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 has allowed school nutrition programs, local

government agencies, and nonprofit organizations to keep feeding children in the face of the numerous challenges the pandemic created by providing the necessary program flexibility. In addition, the waivers have been a critical support to school nutrition programs. According to a USDA survey of school nutrition programs during School Year 2021-2022 school year, 90 percent used the Seamless Summer Option, 92 percent reported supply chain challenges, and nearly one in four school nutrition departments reported staffing challenges[1] ; while 51% of afterschool and summer providers reported staffing challenges.[2]

- **Expand Community Eligibility.** Community eligibility offers an important and viable path forward for schools as they transition from pandemic operations. For the schools that adopted it prior to the pandemic, it transformed their school breakfast and lunch programs, allowing schools to offer meals to all students at no charge, which reduces paperwork for schools and families, and eliminates unpaid school meal fees. Most importantly, it ensures that all students have access to the nutritious meals at school that they need to learn and thrive. Under the current rules, too many high need schools are not eligible. For schools that are eligible, the reimbursement structure can keep them from adopting community eligibility. Congress should lower the eligibility threshold to make more schools eligible to implement community eligible and increase the funding (raising the multiplier from 1.6 to 2.5) so that more schools are able to implement community eligibility. And as a growing number of states move to create statewide programs that offer school meals to all students at no charge, offering a statewide community eligibility option can support those efforts.
- **Create a Nationwide Summer EBT Program.** This approach offers an important way to complement the Summer Nutrition Programs. When schools close, families lose access to healthy free or reduced-price school meals for their children. The result is increased food insecurity among families with children. The existing summer nutrition programs are designed to replace school meals and often support much-needed summer programming, but the reach of these meals is too low. Prior to the pandemic, just one child for every seven who count on free or reduced-price school meals during the school year were served a summer meal. A nationwide Summer EBT program would provide families an EBT card to purchase food when schools are closed. Evaluations of Summer EBT demonstrations have found that they reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition.

We look forward to working with you to include these provisions in the upcoming legislative vehicles being developed by Congress.

An online version of this release can be found [here](#).