

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Introduces bipartisan legislation to extend school and summer meal flexibilities to feed children

Posted on Thursday, Mar 31, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin joined a bipartisan group of Senators to introduce the *Support Kids Not Red Tape Act* to extend the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) school meal flexibilities from June 30, 2022 to September 30, 2023. These flexibilities have been crucial to feeding children throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. With 90% of our schools still facing many challenges as they return to normal operations, these flexibilities give our schools and summer meal programs much-needed support to deal with ongoing food service issues and keep kids fed. The bill will also help schools transition back to normal meal operations under the National School Lunch Program. USDA requested this authority be extended in the omnibus.

“We cannot allow millions of children to lose access to school meals, and we must extend school meal flexibilities to make sure no child goes hungry,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “I have heard directly from parents, teachers and education leaders about the challenges schools still face trying to move past the impacts of this pandemic, and this bipartisan legislation recognizes some of those challenges. Let’s get the job done on this legislation to prevent disruptions to school nutrition programs and make sure kids have access to healthy meals. We can’t let them down, we should work together to lift them up by making sure no child has to face hunger.”

The legislation was led by led by Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). The bipartisan legislation is cosponsored by 50 members of Congress including Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Susan Collins (R-ME), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Bob Casey (D-PA), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Tina Smith (D-MN), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Ed Markey (D-MA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Jack Reed (D-RI), Pat Leahy (D-VT), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Mark Warner (D-VA), Patty Murray (D-WA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chris Coons (D-DE), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Tom Carper (D-DE), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Gary Peters (D-MI), Angus King (I-ME), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Chris Murphy (D-CT), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Jon Tester (D-MT), Chuck Schumer (D-NY), and Maria Cantwell (D-WA).

Anti-hunger and nutrition advocates reiterated the importance of these flexibilities and applauded the Senators' bill to keep critical flexibilities for school nutrition programs to feed children.

"School meal programs, a crucial source of nutritional support for millions of families nationwide, face tremendous immediate and long-term challenges in the absence of these child nutrition waivers," **said Beth Wallace, president of the School Nutrition Association.** "Acute supply chain disruptions, persistent labor shortages and escalating costs make it impossible for these programs to return to normal operations next school year. This legislation is absolutely critical to sustaining school meal programs, ensuring children have access to nutritious school meals and preventing substantial financial losses for schools nationwide."

"The sooner the USDA is authorized to extend child nutrition waivers, the sooner schools and community organizations can plan meal programs for summer and next school year," **said Lisa Davis, senior vice president of Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign.** "Schools and community meal providers continue to face extreme pandemic-related challenges like supply chain disruptions, rising food

prices and staffing shortages. Without waivers, they will have a difficult time responding to these challenges in real-time, impacting their ability to safely and effectively reach kids with the nutrition they need and stunting their ability to transition to normal operations as those challenges subside.”

“Nearly 12 million children struggle to know where their next meal will come from, disrupting their ability to reach their full potential. Fortunately, child nutrition waivers have helped provide year-round access to much-needed nutrition. If the waivers aren’t extended, millions of children will lose that access, with Black, Latino, and Native American children, and children in rural areas, being hit hardest,” **said Vince Hall, chief government relations officer, Feeding America.** “Because of the delay in extending the waivers, some site sponsors will have to close summer and after-school meal sites, translating to taking away meals that families are relying on to keep their kids nourished. Feeding America, the nation’s largest hunger-relief organization, applauds the introduction of this bill to extend child nutrition waivers, continuing this critical lifeline for children. We urge Congress to act immediately to ensure our children don’t face hunger this summer and beyond.”

A broad spectrum of groups sent in letters to Congress to extend the child nutrition waiver authority. Letters included:

- o [Nearly 2,000 anti-hunger, nutrition, education, children’s, school, preschool, and out of school providers, faith groups and industry groups, among others, from all 50 states and the District of Columbia.](#)
- o [Mayors Alliance to End Childhood Hunger](#), which includes representatives from 47 towns;
- o [General Mills](#), and
- o [23 groups, including the School Nutrition Association, School Superintendents Association, National Education Association, National PTA, and American Commodity Distribution Alliance, among others.](#)

Full text of the legislation is available [here](#).