



# BOB CASEY

FIGHTING for PENNSYLVANIA FAMILIES

## The School Hunger Elimination Act of 2024

*U.S. Senator Bob Casey*

The National School Lunch (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) are critical programs that support the long-term health, wellbeing, and learning of children. Together, the programs serve free or reduced-price meals to millions of American children every day. The program helps ensure all students have access to healthy nutritious meals at a critical stage of development. In fact, some children are getting their healthiest meal of the day at school.<sup>1</sup>

Direct certification is a process that helps identify and enroll eligible children in the program, ensuring access for children and minimizing administrative hurdles for families and schools. Community eligibility (CEP) is a tool that allows schools in high-need communities to provide free school meals to all students. However, gaps in eligibility and certification processes are leaving some children behind.

### The School Hunger Elimination Act

The School Hunger Elimination Act would make improvements to the NSLP and SBP to increase school meal access for vulnerable children, reduce administrative burdens for schools, and reduce school meal debt and lunch shaming.

- **Direct certification of all school-age children receiving Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income:** This bill would expand this demonstration, requiring all eligible children participating in Medicaid to be directly certified for free or reduced-priced school meals.
- **Expansion of Mandatory Direct Certification:** This bill would require school districts to directly certify children receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, children in foster care, children attending Head Start, children experiencing homelessness, or children who are runaways or migrants.
- **Increase the community eligibility reimbursement:** The School Hunger Elimination Act would increase the CEP reimbursement multiplier from 1.6 to 2.5, making it easier for eligible schools to cover their costs while forgoing meal fees.
- **Allow community eligibility school groupings across districts:** The School Hunger Elimination Act would establish a demonstration project that would allow groupings for community eligibility to be determined across school districts, potentially even statewide.
- **Retroactive reimbursements:** This bill would expand the time period for retroactive reimbursement and allow such reimbursement to go back to the beginning of the school year.

### Cosponsors

### Supporting Organizations

Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)

<sup>1</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2778453>