

Support the Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act of 2021

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act of 2021, anticipated to be introduced by Representatives Bonamici (D-OR) and Herrera Beutler (R-WA), would strengthen and expand access to nutritious meals for young children through enhancements to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The bill proposes many positive changes that better support children and families who depend on CACFP for the healthy meals and snacks that the program provides.

What is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)?

CACFP provides funding for nutritious meals and snacks served to 4.2 million children each day in child care centers, family child care homes, and afterschool programs. CACFP ensures that children in child care and afterschool programs receive a nutritious diet and learn healthy eating habits. Unfortunately, under the current system, millions of eligible children and child care providers are missing out on the benefits of CACFP.

What does the bill propose?

Allow an additional CACFP meal service (typically a supper or snack) for children in a full day of child care.

National child care standards, which are based on the best nutrition and child development science, specify that young children need to eat small healthy meals and snacks on a regular basis throughout the day. Currently, child care providers can be reimbursed for serving two meals and one snack per day. Many working families rely on child care providers for a full day of care, so their child would benefit from an additional meal or snack in accordance with national child care standards. The bill authorizes child care settings with eight or more hours between the first meal service and the beginning of the last meal service to be eligible to serve an additional meal or snack.

Improve the cost-of-living adjustment for child care home reimbursement rates to reflect more accurately the real costs to providers. Child care homes and child care centers

currently use separate consumer price indices to calculate cost-of-living adjustments for reimbursement rates. The Consumer Price Index for Food at Home, which is the cost-of-living adjustment currently used for CACFP homes, has not kept up with the cost of providing CACFP meals. The bill authorizes all child care providers in CACFP to use the same index, the Consumer Price Index for Food Away From Home. This will improve reimbursement rates for family child care homes, thus allowing for improved nutrition and participation. Increasing the availability and consumption of fruits and vegetables, whole-grain foods, and lower-fat dairy products among young children in child care is absolutely essential to improve development, health, and prevent obesity.

Allow annual eligibility for proprietary (for-profit) child care centers to streamline program operations.

Proprietary child care centers are eligible to participate in CACFP if at least 25 percent of the children they serve are living in households earning a low income. Many of these child care centers are small, independent operations that provide much-needed child care and afterschool programs to low-income children in underserved areas. Currently, these child care centers are required to document institutional eligibility every month rather than annually, which is allowed for other centers and homes.

Reduce unnecessary and duplicative paperwork resulting from federal and state regulations and record-keeping requirements.

The provision identifies key areas to address, including streamlining and modernizing the application, monitoring, and auditing processes; eliminating the use of enrollment forms; allowing the use of direct certification in all states; and requiring states to accept digital forms, digitized and electronic signatures, and electronic records as documentation.

Learn more about this legislation and actions you can take to ensure that these provisions are part of the final child nutrition bill later this year by going to [FRAC's Child Nutrition Reauthorization webpage](#).