

Date of Hearing: July 15, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Alex Lee, Chair

SB 411 (Pérez) – As Amended July 7, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: Stop Child Hunger Act of 2025

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Education (CDE), with support from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), to develop a statewide application that is made available through a single statewide website that enables families to submit federally required information for meal eligibility and adheres to specified requirements. Adds charter schools to existing requirements for school meal programs. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the Stop Child Hunger Act of 2025.
- 2) Clarifies that school districts, county offices of education (COEs), and charter schools are included in the current requirement for CDE to follow federal guidelines and regulations to maximize flexibility for local educational agencies (LEAs) to distribute summer meals through noncongregate distributions.
- 3) Requires CDE, with support from CDSS, to comply with federal regulations described in 10) below in existing law, by developing and providing families with a statewide application that is made available through a single statewide internet website that enables families to submit federally required information.
- 4) Requires the statewide application to adhere to all of the following:
 - a) Is made available with sufficient time for families to apply for summer of 2028 benefits;
 - b) Has the ability to, upon completion of the application, be routed to the applicant family's LEA to determine Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (Summer EBT) Program (SUN Bucks in California) eligibility;
 - c) Meets the requirements for CDE's new student benefit form that is in an alternative electronic format that meets the requirements and purposes of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), and also the federal requirements to determine eligibility for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and SUN Bucks;
 - d) Is limited, with regard to information requested, to minimum requirements under federal law and guidance; and,
 - e) Is translated with accessible language into at least all threshold languages that are required for the CalFresh program.
- 5) Exempts the statewide application from the Project Approval Lifecycle of the Department of Technology, as described in 7) below, in existing law.

- 6) Requires, upon request, a school district, COE, or charter school to make an electronic device available for families to use to access the statewide application.
- 7) Specifies, if required by federal law and guidance, the governing board of a school district, the county superintendent of schools, and the governing body of a charter school shall make paper applications for free or reduced-price meals available to pupils at all times during each regular schoolday, and may also make an application electronically available online.
- 8) Clarifies that in addition to a school district and county superintendent of schools, that a charter school must also use all other paper applications that it has for free or reduced-price meals before utilizing the applications pursuant to this subdivision.
- 9) Clarifies that the online application shall comply with specified requirements if a governing board of a school district, a COE, or a school food authority chooses to provide access to an online application for free or reduced-price meals, to include the governing body of a charter school.
- 10) Requires the online application for free or reduced-price meals to include links to the internet website providing information about the federal Summer EBT program.
- 11) Clarifies that no online application for free or reduced-price meals shall be made available online or made accessible online by a school district, COE, or a school food authority if the online application allows for the information provided by an applicant to be used by a private entity for any purpose not related to the administration of a school food program, or if the online application requires an applicant to waive any right or to create a user account in order to submit the application, to include charter schools.
- 12) Requires the governing board of each school district, each county superintendent of schools, and the governing body of each charter school to formulate a plan for schools that do not serve meals universally to all children to ensure that children eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals and milk are not be treated differently from other children rather than only requiring all school districts and county superintendent of schools to formulate a plan.
- 13) Removes the requirement for plans as described in 12) above, to include when more than one lunch or breakfast or type of milk is offered, the children shall have the same choice of meals or milk that is available to those children who pay the full price for their meal or milk.
- 14) Requires CDSS to support CDE in implementing requirements with regard to developing and providing families with, a statewide application that is made available through a single statewide internet website for purposes of the Summer EBT program.
- 15) Makes technical changes.
- 16) Makes the following findings and declarations:
 - a) No child in California should experience hunger, and all children deserve access to nutrition year round.
 - b) Families across the country are struggling to afford healthy and adequate groceries.

- c) California has led the nation in establishing a universal school meals program for all students, ensuring access to healthy, locally grown breakfasts and lunches during the school year, and in implementing the Summer EBT program, known in California as SUN Bucks, which provided five million children with a supplemental food benefit in summer of 2024.
- d) These programs have made life more affordable for families with children, helping to reduce monthly food bills by an average of \$150 per week.
- e) The United States Congress established the Summer EBT program as the first new federal entitlement in decades, under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (Public Law 117-328), as set forth in Section 1762 of Title 42 of the United States Code. In turn, SUN Bucks was launched in summer of 2024.
- f) SUN Bucks, based on a pilot program that produced a decade of evidence that it reduced hunger and helped the hungriest children the most, is remarkably effective in reducing summer child hunger.
- g) California is urged to build on its leadership in the fight against child hunger by extending these child nutrition programs to prevent hunger among children during school closures of a week or more and during disasters that cause schools to close.
- h) The Legislature is urged to direct the SUN Bucks administering departments, including CDSS, as the lead SUN Bucks agency, and CDE, to annually maximize receipt of as much as \$216 million in federally funded food assistance for the 1.8 million children who need to apply, and to protect the private information of participating families by immediately implementing Section 292.13 of Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations, which requires states to provide a statewide application for the Summer EBT program.
- i) The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established that every \$1 in federal food aid creates as much as \$1.80 in total gross domestic product, as benefits support California's vital food economy and workers. Accordingly, increasing access to federally funded meals and food benefits is not only good for children, but also good for our economy.
- j) A statewide web application will support families who have been devastated by the wildfires in the County of Los Angeles and who are already navigating the Federal Emergency Management Agency and programs to easily access the food aid to which their children are federally entitled.

EXISTING LAW:

State law:

- 1) Establishes that access to sufficient affordable and healthy food is a human right and requires state agencies and departments to consider this state policy when it is pertinent to the distribution of sufficient affordable food. (Welfare and Institutions Code [WIC] § 18700)

- 2) Establishes the CalFresh program to administer the provision of federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to families and individuals meeting certain criteria, as specified. (WIC § 18900 *et seq.*)
- 3) Establishes in the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Act, a system for the distribution and use of public assistance benefits, such as California Work Opportunities and Responsibilities to Kids (CalWORKs) and CalFresh, and requires EBT access to be provided through automated teller machines, point-of-sale devices and other devices that accept EBT transactions. (WIC § 10065 *et seq.*)
- 4) Requires school districts, COEs, and charter schools, beginning with the 2022-23 school year, to make available a nutritionally adequate breakfast and a nutritionally adequate lunch (that qualify for federal reimbursement) free of charge during each school day to any student who requests a meal without consideration of the student's eligibility for a federally funded free or reduced-price meal. (Education Code [EDC] § 49501.5(a)(1)(A)(i))
- 5) Requires CDE to work with CDSS to maximize participation in the federal Summer EBT program. Requires CDE to share all data determined by the departments to be necessary. (EDC § 49506(a)(1-2))
- 6) Requires school districts and COEs to make paper applications for free or reduced-price meals available to students at all times during each regular school day, and are authorized to also make an application electronically available online, as specified. Requires online applications to comply with the following requirements, among other things:
 - a) Include a link to the internet website on which translated applications are posted by the USDA, with instructions in that language that inform the applicant how to submit the application;
 - b) Require completion of only those questions that are necessary for determining eligibility;
 - c) Include clear instructions for families that are homeless or are migrants;
 - d) Comply with specified privacy rights and disclosure protections;
 - e) Include links to all of the following:
 - i) The online application to CalFresh;
 - ii) The online single state application for health care;
 - iii) The Department of Public Health's web page, *About Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Program and How to Apply*, or another web page that connects families to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children; and,
 - iv) The website of a summer lunch program authorized to participate within the city or school district. (EDC § 49557(a)(3))

- 7) Establishes the Project Approval Lifecycle as the mandatory process for approving state information technology projects to ensure planning, cost accuracy, and oversight before expending resources. (State Administrative Manual § 4819.35)

Federal law:

- 8) Establishes SNAP pursuant to the Food Stamp Act of 1964. (7 United States Code [U.S.C.] § 2011 *et seq.*)
- 9) Establishes the Summer EBT program, which provides nutritional assistance to eligible households with children during the summer months when school is not in session. (42 U.S.C § 1762)
- 10) Requires states to provide a statewide application for the Summer EBT program by 2025 and establishes Summer EBT application requirements. (7 Code of Federal Regulations § 292.13)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations on May 23, 2025, the bill’s requirement for CDE to develop a statewide application that enables families to submit federally required information for meal eligibility could result in additional, one-time costs that are likely to be minor and absorbable within existing resources.

COMMENTS:

Background: *Child Hunger & Food Insecurity.* For millions of children in California, school meals serve as a primary source of daily nutrition. During the academic year, federally funded school food programs help ensure that students from low-income households receive consistent, healthy meals. However, when schools are out for the summer, many of these children lose access to that critical food support, creating a seasonal gap that puts their health and well-being at risk. This period, commonly referred to as “summer hunger,” disproportionately affects families already struggling to afford adequate groceries. Without the structure and resources of the school meal system, caregivers are often forced to stretch limited household food budgets, sometimes going without meals themselves so their children can eat. Studies have shown that food insecurity increases during summer months, particularly among households with children eligible for free or reduced-price meals during the school year.

Children who experience hunger face significant challenges. Young children with inadequate or interrupted food intake are at a higher risk of iron deficiency, respiratory illnesses, infections, and developmental delays. In school-aged children, food insecurity is associated with poor academic performance, attention difficulties, and behavioral issues. These children are more likely to repeat a grade, struggle in math and reading, and experience social difficulties. While parents may try to shield their children from food insecurity, research shows that school-aged children are aware of it and often feel helpless or angry when food is scarce. In adolescence, food insecurity is associated with risky sexual behaviors, drug and alcohol abuse, greater exposure to violence, high-risk pregnancy, and suicide ideation. Long-term, these disadvantages contribute to lower educational attainment, reduced job opportunities, and intergenerational cycles of poverty and food insecurity.

Beyond physical health, food insecurity leads to emotional and psychological distress, often referred to as “hunger of the mind.” The stress of uncertain food access causes anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Feelings of shame, fear, and powerlessness are common,

particularly among parents struggling to provide for their families. Adolescents experiencing food insecurity face higher risks of mental health struggles, suicidal ideation, and risky behaviors. Any health conditions resulting from food insecurity can be an added cost burden to families.

CalFresh. SNAP (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) is the largest federal food safety-net program that serves as the first line of defense against hunger and food insecurity for low-income households. In California, federal SNAP funds are administered through the CalFresh program. Overseen by CDSS and administered locally by county human services departments, CalFresh serves a large and diverse caseload, with substantial shares comprising low-income working families with children, elderly and disabled people, and low-income individuals with barriers to employment. Participants use EBT cards to purchase eligible food items such as fruits and vegetables, meat, dairy products, and seeds and plants that produce food at authorized retailers, including grocery stores, supermarkets, and farmers' markets.

The USDA establishes the gross and net income requirements for CalFresh eligibility, limiting California's flexibility in setting its own criteria. If a family passes the gross income test, the net income test is computed, and the amount is determined by deducting certain income from a household's gross income. Currently, the maximum allowable gross income is 200% of the federal poverty level, although households with elderly members or members with disabilities are not subject to gross income criteria. Effective October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025, the maximum annual gross income for a household size of three is \$33,576.

CalFresh plays a critical role in reducing food insecurity in California. Research shows that SNAP reduces overall food insecurity by about 20% and reduces food insecurity among children by approximately 33%. According to the CalFresh dashboard, maintained by CDSS, in 2024, there were 5,477,497 CalFresh recipients in California with 1,913,371 recipients being under 18 years of age. Effective October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025, the maximum CalFresh benefit for a household of one was \$292 per month, while a household of three was \$768 per month. However, most households do not receive the maximum benefit. In 2024, the average monthly benefit in California was \$189 per person.

School-Year Meal Programs. The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are federally funded programs that help LEAs, including school districts, COEs, and charter schools, serve nutritious meals to students during the school year. By following federal requirements, such as meeting nutrition standards and meal pattern guidelines, LEAs receive per-meal reimbursements. Reimbursement rates vary depending on a student's household's income, with higher rates provided for meals served to students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. To receive state funding for school meals, California law requires LEAs to participate in both the NSLP and SBP. The state supplements federal meal reimbursements with additional funding per meal served, helping cover the cost of providing meals to all students.

In fiscal year 2023, NSLP served 4.6 billion lunches at a cost of \$17.2 billion, while SBP served 2.4 billion breakfasts nationwide to 2.2 million children at a cost of \$5.2 billion.

California's Universal Meal Program started in the 2022-23 school year, which requires all public school districts, COEs, and charter schools to provide two free, nutritionally adequate meals each school day to any student who requests them, regardless of income eligibility. To receive this state's supplemental reimbursement, LEAs must participate in the NSLP and SBP. While the state covers the cost of meals for all students, the federal government only reimburses

meals served to students who meet income eligibility criteria, unless the school participates in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2, which allows schools with a higher percentage of low-income students to offer meals to all students and claim federal reimbursements accordingly. As a result, LEAs still need to collect income information from families to qualify for maximum federal reimbursement and meet requirements related to other education funding streams, such as the LCFF.

Summer Meal Programs. Established in 1975, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federal program administered by the USDA that reimburses sponsors for the cost of providing free meals to children up to 18 years of age during traditional summer breaks and school vacation periods lasting more than 15 days for year-round schools. Eligible sponsors include school food authorities, local governments, colleges and universities, residential summer camps, and nonprofit organizations. Meals are typically served in congregate settings such as schools, parks, libraries, and community centers in areas where at least 50% of children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Sponsors may choose to serve breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, or a certain combination of meals. SFSP meals are reimbursed at a higher rate than NSLP and SBP meals.

In fiscal year 2023, the program served 136 million meals at a cost of about \$547 million nationwide. In July 2023, the month when SFSP operations typically peak, the program provided meals to 2.2 million children each day across more than 35,000 sites.

The Seamless Summer Option (SSO) is an alternative summer meal program available to schools already participating in the NSLP or SBP. It allows these schools to provide free summer meals to children up to 18 years of age with reduced administrative burden compared to the SFSP. SSO can be operated at similar sites, including schools, libraries, community centers, and other approved locations during traditional summer breaks and school vacations longer than 10 days. It streamlines paperwork by aligning with school-year operations.

SUN Bucks. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 authorized the creation of a new federal food and nutrition assistance program called Summer EBT, known as SUN Bucks in California. This program began operating in summer 2024 and provides households with school-aged children eligible for free and reduced-price school meals with benefits that can be used to purchase groceries during the summer months when most schools are closed for instruction. Specifically, SUN Bucks provides eligible children with \$40 per month, or \$120 total, during summer breaks to purchase groceries using their existing EBT cards at any authorized retailer, including grocery stores and farmers markets. As a federally funded entitlement program, SUN Bucks is available to all qualifying children, which is an estimated 31 million nationwide, with annual federal costs projected at \$3.5 to \$4 billion.

SUN Bucks complements rather than replaces the SFSP and SSO. While meal sites remain available in many communities, SUN Bucks gives families flexibility to shop for groceries on their own schedule, removing barriers such as transportation and rigid site schedules. Evaluations of pilot programs show that families use most of their benefits to buy healthy food, and that the program is more cost-effective than traditional meal distribution because it avoids food prep and service overhead. States operate the program in partnership with their education and human services agencies, which in California are CDE and CDSS, and are required to cover 50% of administrative costs to participate.

By operating like CalFresh during the summer, SUN Bucks can reduce hunger, improve nutrition, and boost school readiness, all at a cost of roughly 1% of SNAP's annual budget, according to a Brookings Institution article published on June 26, 2025, titled, "*SUN Bucks: A new chapter in the fight against child hunger.*" By preventing summer hunger, SUN Bucks may also help combat learning loss, commonly known as "summer slide," and ensure children return to school ready to succeed. Beyond reducing hardship, the program's \$3.5 billion in benefits is projected to generate over \$5 billion in local economic activity each summer, providing a boost to families, small businesses, farmers, and entire communities.

Eligibility for SUN Bucks is primarily determined through automatic or "streamlined" certification using existing state data systems. Most eligible children are identified without needing to apply if they are between 6 and 18 years of age and enrolled in CalFresh, CalWORKs, or Medi-Cal, with household income at or below 185% of the federal poverty level. These students are identified through CDSS' California Statewide Automated Welfare System. Children can also qualify if they attend a school that participates in the NSLP or SBP and are identified as eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This can happen through an NSLP application, a Universal Benefits Application (UBA), local direct certification, or a designation as homeless, migrant, or foster youth.

CDE provides a federally compliant UBA template for schools operating under CEP or Provision 2. These applications may also be used for LCFF and other local benefits. LEAs may also use their own SUN Bucks-compliant form if it meets federal requirements, and can offer UBAs through online portals or in paper form. First-time students in the 2025-26 school year are required to submit a UBA, as Alternative Income Forms will no longer qualify them for SUN Bucks at CEP or Provision 2 schools. While California's Universal Meals Program provides free meals to all students, it does not determine SUN Bucks eligibility, which still depends on household income verification. To ensure program integrity, LEAs are required to verify eligibility determinations made through the UBA or other compliant SUN Bucks applications, which involves confirming application information using administrative records or documentation from the household, as required by federal regulations.

State law requires CDSS, in collaboration with CDE, to maximize participation in the federal Summer EBT program, and share necessary data to meet program requirements. *This bill* requires CDE, with support from CDSS, to develop and provide families with a single statewide online application to apply for SUN Bucks benefits, in compliance with federal regulations. *This bill* further requires the application to be made available in time for families to apply for benefits for the summer of 2028 and to have the capacity to route completed applications to the appropriate LEA for eligibility determination. *This bill* also limits data collection to federally required information and requires the application to be translated into all threshold languages required under CalFresh. Upon request, an electronic device must be available through school districts, COEs, or charter schools to help families access the application. Lastly, if a school district, COE, charter school, or school food authority offers an online application for free or reduced-price meals, *this bill* requires the application to include a link to the SUN Bucks program website.

Federal Actions. Designed as a massive omnibus reconciliation act, H.R. 1 was signed into law by President Trump on July 4, 2025, which among other things, enacted significant changes to social programs, including major reductions to Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) and SNAP, adding hundreds of billions in cuts to these programs. While H.R. 1 does not directly change or

eliminate the Summer EBT program, keeping the program's structure, benefit amount, and eligibility criteria intact, H.R. 1's drastic cuts to SNAP could indirectly impact families' access to Summer EBT. Because many children are automatically eligible for Summer EBT if they receive benefits through programs like CalFresh, CalWORKs, or Medi-Cal, reductions in participation in these programs could mean fewer children are automatically certified for SUN Bucks. H.R. 1 imposes stricter work requirements and eligibility limits for SNAP, increasing the age range for work requirements from 18 to 54 years of age, to 18 to 64 years of age, and reducing federal spending on food assistance by an estimated \$186 billion over the next decade. These changes could result in families losing access to public benefit programs that qualify their children for SUN Bucks.

Author's Statement: According to the Author, "[This bill] addresses gaps in school meal access by creating an accessible and secure statewide website for families to apply for SUN Bucks, requiring school meal applications to include the SUN Bucks application, and codifying key child privacy protections to protect personal data."

Equity Implications: While California has made major strides addressing child hunger through universal school meals and SUN Bucks, an estimated 1.8 million eligible children may still be missing out on summer nutrition benefits. *This bill* aims to address those disparities by streamlining the enrollment process through a centralized, statewide online application. By creating a single platform that allows families to submit required information, *this bill* seeks to remove administrative barriers that often disproportionately affect families with limited time, internet access, or familiarity with public programs.

Furthermore, *this bill* requires the application to be available in all CalFresh threshold languages and requires that schools provide electronic devices upon request, helping to ensure that language barriers and technology gaps, often tied to race, income, and geography, do not prevent eligible children from accessing food assistance.

Double referral: This bill was previously heard in the Assembly Education Committee on July 3, 2025, and was approved on a 9-0 vote.

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

SB 225 (McKerney) of 2025, would have required CDE to establish a reimbursement process for federal summer meal program operators for meals served to guardians of eligible pupils who participate in a summer meal program. *SB 225 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 2595 (L. Rivas) of 2024, was substantially similar to SB 225. *AB 2595 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 1178 (L. Rivas) of 2023, was substantially similar to SB 225. *AB 1178 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 95 (Hoover), Chapter 318, Statutes of 2023, clarified that a school may sell an additional meal to a pupil after that pupil has already received a nutritionally adequate meal that qualifies for federal reimbursement.

SB 364 (Skinner) of 2021, would have required CDSS to issue EBT benefits to certain low-income students for each summer break, contingent on an appropriation, and would have made various changes to free and-reduced price meal processes at LEAs. *SB 364 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.*

AB 130 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 44, Statutes of 2021, established a California Universal Meals Program with changes to the state meal mandate and new requirements for high-poverty schools to apply for a federal provision.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Association of Food Banks (Co-Sponsor)
California State Council of Service Employees International Union (SEIU California) (Co-Sponsor)
GRACE/End Child Poverty California (Co-Sponsor)
Alameda County Community Food Bank
Alchemist CDC
Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement
Back to the Start
California Food and Farming Network
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Teachers Association
California WIC Association
Center for Ecoliteracy (UNREG)
Ceres Community Project
City of Glendale
Community Action Partnership of Orange County
Courage California
Farm2People
Feeding San Diego
Food Access LA
Food for People, the Food Bank for Humboldt County
Food in Need of Distribution Food Bank
Friends Committee on Legislation of California
Fullwell
Glide
Hadassah
JCC/Federation of San Luis Obispo
JCRC Bay Area
Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund
Jewish Community Relations Council, Santa Barbara
Jewish Democratic Club of Marin
Jewish Family & Community Services East Bay
Jewish Family and Children's Service of Long Beach and Orange County
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties
Jewish Family Service LA

Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles
Jewish Family Service of San Diego
Jewish Family Service of the Desert
Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley
Jewish Federation Los Angeles
Jewish Federation of the Greater San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys
Jewish Free Loan Association
Jewish Long Beach
Jewish Public Affairs Committee
JVS SoCal
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Marin Food Policy Council
Mazon: a Jewish Response to Hunger
NextGen California
Nourish California
Oakland Unified School District
Pesticide Action Network North America
Roots of Change
Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County
Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley
Sierra Harvest
Western Center on Law & Poverty
What We All Deserve (WWAD)

Opposition

None on file.

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