

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Advocacy Toolkit

Let's work together to keep kids fed in child care, Head Start, and after-school programs

August 2024 updates

Urgent action needed

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), created by Congress in 1968, is an essential federal support for young children. The Child Nutrition Act, the law that authorizes CACFP, was last reauthorized in 2010. During the pandemic, temporary investments and policy flexibilities made a difference. **Those interventions have expired, but there is momentum with the introduction of bills to make investments and improvements to keep kids fed.**

The early childhood workforce in Early Head Start, Head Start, child care centers, family child care programs, and at-risk afterschool programs are working tirelessly to ensure children do not go hungry and continue to have opportunities to learn and grow, all while one out of three child care providers themselves is food insecure. **Child care, Head Start, and at-risk afterschool programs are struggling to feed the children during a time when access to quality, affordable care is already threatened. We cannot stand by and allow this to happen. We need to bolster support in Congress!**

National, state, and local advocates, in this toolkit you will find:

- [Bill text, summaries, and links to the latest lists of cosponsors in the House and Senate](#)
- [Suggested social media content](#)
- [Action steps for advocates to contact Members of Congress](#)
- 🚩 **NEW!** [Action steps for the August 2024 Congressional Recess](#)
- [Fact sheets to support your advocacy](#) ← new material here!
- [Background for advocates: how does CACFP work?](#)

Thank you to the teamwork and leadership in creating this toolkit:



If you have questions please contact: Becky Levin, AFSCME blevin@afscme.org; Samantha Marshall, CACFP Roundtable samantha@ccfproundtable.org; or Mary Beth Testa, Home Grown marybeth@mbstsolutions.com

Quick summaries of the CACFP bills in Congress

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act (H.R. 6067 and S.4002)

This bipartisan bill in the House was introduced by Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) and Representative Marc Molinaro (R-NY), and in the Senate by Senator Casey (D-PA). The bill calls for:

- Adding another meal service to be reimbursed in CACFP when this 3rd meal is offered 8 hours after the first meal service of the program day
- Changing the payment policy so that family child care programs in CACFP are reimbursed based on "food away from home," measure of the Consumer Price Index, the same way child care centers' rates are calculated
- Reducing paperwork by simplifying eligibility reporting for for-profit child care centers
- Calling on the Secretary of USDA to review the CACFP Serious Deficiency process
- Establishing an Advisory Committee on CACFP paperwork.

The Child Care Nutrition Enhancement Act (H.R. 5569 and S. 3294)

The House bill was introduced by Representative Greg Landsman (D-OH) and Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) and calls for:

- Providing a 10 cent increase for all eligible meals and snacks in all CACFP-participating Head Start programs, child care centers, family child care programs, at-risk after school programs, and adult care programs
- Eliminating the harmful two-tier system for family child care in CACFP
- Allowing family child care providers in CACFP to be reimbursed for meals provided to their own children when also providing them for CACFP-eligible children

The Senate bill was introduced by Senator Bob Casey (D-PA). The bill has the same three provisions as H.R. 5569, plus one more:

- Changing the payment policy so that family child care programs in CACFP are reimbursed based on the "food away from home" measure of the Consumer Price Index, the same way child care centers' rates are calculated

The Child Care Nutrition Enhancement Act		The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act	
HR 5569	S. 3294	HR 6067	S. 4002
Introduced Sept. 2023 by Rep. Landsman (D-OH) and Rep. Bonamici (D-OR)	Introduced Nov. 2023 by Senator Casey (D-PA)	Introduced Oct. 2023 by Rep. Bonamici (D-OR) and Rep. Molinaro (R-NY)	Introduced March 2024 by Senator Casey (D-PA)
Org endorsements	Org endorsements	Org endorsements	Org endorsements
House cosponsors	Senate cosponsors	House cosponsors	Senate cosponsors
Bill text	Bill text	Bill text	Bill text

Quick guide to the content of all four CACFP bills

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VDACkc_fljL3Ynp9NnCXAkODfsmD5akx-ckwLqUEs/edit?usp=sharing

Sample social media posts

📌 We agree! #ChildCare Providers Need More Than Pennies! Check out the latest from @HomeGrownOrg about meals and snacks in #childcare: <https://tinyurl.com/bdznjtba> #CACFP #familychildcare

"People need to hear and understand the challenges providers face serving nutritious meals. Food insecurity is real and we have many families struggling to put healthy food on the table." - #familychildcare leader, #Arkansas. Read more: <https://jumpshare.com/v/tRcEOleS2PkM32UJnAyg>

Meals, snacks, #childcare, & the high price of groceries: "A pack of chicken breast, for example, takes two days' worth of reimbursement. This seems to be an unfair system." Read more about #CACFP in #Georgia: <https://jumpshare.com/v/5I2597o2g6VD2V8baeSv> @QCCGeorgia

🍎🍌 Did you know? #CACFP supports healthy meals & snacks for 4+ million children each DAY in #childcare, #HeadStart & #afterschool programs! Join us to support the Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act & the Child Care Nutrition Enhancement Act!

📌 New data: #CACFP Action Needed as Participation Drops After Expiration of Key Program Modernizations. Time for long-overdue improvements to support healthy meals in #childcare #HeadStart. <https://jmp.sh/AhkaXY2Z>

📌 1 in 7 households with babies experience food insecurity, according to @ZEROTOTHREE #StateofBabies Yearbook. #CACFP Action Needed <https://jumpshare.com/v/z24v8p9P5cC5nLQYPpr1>

.@senossoff @SenatorWarnock, children and families are counting on #CACFP meals and snacks, and #childcare providers are counting your support. New data about the needs in #Georgia: <https://jumpshare.com/v/5I2597o2g6VD2V8baeSv> Please cosponsor the Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act & the Child Care Nutrition Enhancement Act! @QCCGeorgia

🍌 Child Care Nutrition Enhancement Act is good for families and #ece programs: add'l 10 cents for eligible meals, eliminates tiering for #familychildcare. [Member of Congress], please co-sponsor the bill today! @RepGregLandsman @RepBonamici @SenBobCasey <https://jmp.sh/AhkaXY2Z>

☑️ The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act is good for kids and communities: add'l meal for kids in care while their families work, and making #CACFP smooth, equitable and fair! Thank you @RepBonamici @RepMolinaroNY19 @SenBobCasey

📌 #ECE workforce wants to spend more time caring for children, less time on paperwork. The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act intro'd by @SenBobCasey @RepBonamici @RepMolinaroNY19 will help #CACFP run smoothly so meals and caregivers are where they need to be.

Action steps for advocates to contact Congress about CACFP

Each year, the federal government reevaluates the reimbursement rates for CACFP using the Consumer Price Index. On July 10, the USDA published the CACFP reimbursement rates for child care centers and family child care for the 2024-25 program year.

The modest CACFP reimbursement rate increases, only 1% for home-based child care and 4% for centers, will do little to address the ongoing financial hardship providers face in providing high-quality, nutritious food to young children.

One percent of the \$1.65 reimbursement for breakfast (if you're Tier I family child care) is one penny.

This is solved in Congress and not within USDA. [The Child Care Nutrition Enhancement Act and the Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act](#) address these issues and more!

Resources for education and advocacy:

- [USDA rates announcement](#)
- Thank you for [reading and sharing this commentary from Home Grown](#)
- Ask your members/affiliates/community to advocate for meals and snacks! Thanks to our friends at the National CACFP Sponsors Association for making this easy to do: <https://www.cacfp.org/action-center/>
- [Here is a sample message](#) you can modify and make your own, to share the news about the rates and encourage advocacy!
- If you are available for meetings with Congressional staff on Zoom or in person, we would love to team up with you. Please contact Mary Beth Testa, Home Grown consultant, at marybeth@mbstsolutions.com and she can connect you to the right teammates!

Action steps for advocates during the August Congressional Recess

U.S. Senators and Representatives will be home in their states and districts [for the month of August](#). While we are advocating for child care and Head Start, we can also advocate for CACFP! These are separate things to Members of Congress, but they all come together in an early childhood program kitchen and for the children benefiting from healthy meals and snacks.

Have your Members of Congress cosponsored any of the CACFP bills yet? [Find out here](#) and then get ready for action!

Even if your Senators and Representatives have already added their name in support, staying in touch helps them remember how important this is!

Ideas for action:

- Connect with area family child care programs, child care centers or Head Start programs and host a Member of Congress to visit at snack time (great photo opportunity!)
 - [Check out these tips from National CACFP Sponsors Association](#)
 - [Check out these tips from FRAC](#)
- Bring together early childhood advocates and include hunger, nutrition and CACFP talking points in a district office meeting about child care and Head Start!
- [Here is a sample message](#) you can modify and make your own, to share the news about the most recent CACFP rates and encourage advocacy!
- Share messages on social media about hunger, nutrition, and CACFP! Check out the samples in this toolkit.
- Send an email to Congressional staff including this fact sheet, ask them to cosponsor the bills, and ask for a time to talk: <https://jmp.sh/AhkaXY2Z>
 - And, if you're in Georgia you can share: <https://jumpshare.com/v/5l2597o2g6VD2V8baeSv>
 - If you're in Ohio you can share: <https://jumpshare.com/v/mDP9C5RHINSOm4cKN6fg>
 - If you're in Arkansas you can share: <https://jumpshare.com/v/tRcEOleS2PkM32UJnAyg>
 - If your priority is infants and toddlers you can share: <https://jumpshare.com/v/z24v8p9P5cC5nLQYPpr1>

Related: [invite your Member of Congress to be a SNAP Caseworker](#)

CACFP Support in the U.S. House

Cosponsoring the 3rd meal bill in the House:

Republicans

1. [Molinaro \[R-NY-19\]](#)
2. [Fitzpatrick \[R-PA-1\]](#)
3. [Garbarino \[R-NY-2\]](#)
4. [Lawler \[R-NY-17\]](#)
5. [Mace \[R-SC-1\]](#)

Democrats

1. [Bonamici \[D-OR-1\]](#)
2. [Caraveo \[D-CO-8\]](#)
3. [Castro \[D-TX-20\]](#)
4. [Cuellar \[D-TX-28\]](#)
5. [DeSautnier \[D-CA-10\]](#)
6. [Grijalva \[D-AZ-7\]](#)
7. [Norton \[D-DC-At Large\]](#)
8. [Watson Coleman \[D-NJ-12\]](#)

Cosponsoring the tiering/10 cents bill in the House:

There are 50 cosponsors...

U.S. House Advocacy To-Do List

Use the CACFP Advocacy Toolkit to look up the latest list of cosponsors!

Republican Representatives:
→ 3rd meal bill is great, and bipartisan, and they need to hear from constituents about this!

Any Representative not yet listed:
→ Let's go! Children, families, providers and communities need this!

CACFP Support in the U.S. Senate

Cosponsoring **BOTH** the 3rd meal bill **AND** the tiering/10 cents bill in the Senate:

[Blumenthal \[D-CT\]](#)

[Smith \[D-MN\]](#)

★ [Casey \[D-PA\]](#)

[Fetterman \[D-PA\]](#)

[Reed \[D-RI\]](#)

[Sanders \[I-VT\]](#)

[Welch \[D-VT\]](#)

Cosponsoring the tiering/10 cents bill in the Senate:

[Hirono \[D-HI\]](#)

[Markey \[D-MA\]](#)

[Warren \[D-MA\]](#)

[Shaheen \[D-NH\]](#)

[Gillibrand \[D-NY\]](#)

[Brown \[D-OH\]](#)

[Merkley \[D-OR\]](#)

[Baldwin \[D-WI\]](#)

U.S. Senate Advocacy To-Do List

Senators on the tiering bill:
→ Ask them to support the 3rd meal bill too!

Republican Senators:
→ 3rd meal bill is great, and bipartisan in the House, and they need to hear from constituents about this!

Any Senator not yet listed:
→ Let's go! Children, families, providers and communities need this!

Materials Advocates Can Share

CACFP Sponsor and Child Care Home Provider Participation Drops After Loss of Key Program Modernizations

The latest piece we're excited to share with you is about tiering, 10 cents, and the loss of waivers especially virtual monitoring. It incorporates the most recently available data from USDA as well as the recent Sponsor/FCC surveys.

- Version for Hill staff <https://jmp.sh/AhkaXY2Z>
 - This has info about the Child Care Nutrition Enhancement Act and the Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act on the first page.
 - Please share with your networks and in any Hill meetings!
- Wonky Version <https://jmp.sh/NaYHJ1K1>
 - more data tables, and does not talk about the bills in Congress.
 - There are advocates, agency folks, research partners and more who want this too! Please share!

Let's look at the data and experience from some specific lenses:

- Infants and toddlers <https://jumpshare.com/v/z24v8p9P5cC5nLQYPpr1>
- Experiences in Georgia <https://jumpshare.com/v/5I2597o2g6VD2V8baeSv>
- Experiences in Ohio <https://jumpshare.com/v/mDP9C5RHINSOm4cKN6fg>
- Experiences in Arkansas <https://jumpshare.com/v/tRcEOleS2PkM32UJnAxc>

Special thanks to Katie Jacobs, Hunger Solutions Consulting, for the analysis and creation of these pieces.

New resource for CACFP advocacy! Provider Profiles

Let's share the food, nutrition and CACFP experiences of caregivers!

- Sheryl Hutzenbiler, [Montana](#)
- Kim Chase, [Nebraska](#)
- Erika Sanchez, [New Jersey](#)
- Shalicia Jackson, [North Carolina](#)
- Adrienne Briggs, [Pennsylvania](#)
- Regina-Sanna Wilhite, [Texas](#)
- Tammie Hazlett, [Vermont](#)

Special thanks to the Home Grown team for these provider profiles! Find more at <https://homegrownchildcare.org/meet-the-providers/>

How does CACFP work? Handy background for advocates

Each day, [more than 4.2 million children have nutritious meals and snacks through CACFP](#). Good nutrition in the first years of life is critical for early brain development, and research indicates that meals and snacks served in CACFP-participating child care programs are of higher quality than in non-CACFP programs.

Meals and snacks must comply with the Meal Pattern standards for health and nutrition. Care settings can be reimbursed for up to two meals and one snack (or one meal and two snacks) served to program participants each day. At-risk afterschool programs can serve a needed snack and supper as part of enrichment activities to school-aged children each day.

Eligibility differs between types of care. For-profit child care centers have to meet a 25% low-income eligibility threshold in order to qualify for the program each month: at least 25 percent of children in care have a low family income. Non-profit centers are always eligible. At-risk afterschool programs are eligible if at least 50 percent of the local school district is identified as low-income. For this reason, at-risk programs are reimbursed at the highest rate (the free rate).

Child care centers are partially reimbursed at the free, reduced, or paid rates depending on family income. Head Start/Early Head Start are reimbursed at the “free” rate because they predominantly serve families from low-income backgrounds, and are required to serve meals through a USDA meal program.

Currently, family child care programs receive varying rates of partial reimbursement through a complex and often burdensome two tiered system. The top tier of reimbursement is available to providers in communities qualifying as low income and through individual income tests. The top tier of reimbursements for home-based care are considerably lower than the top tier for child care centers. These reimbursements do not cover the actual cost for home-based providers to serve healthy CACFP meals, especially as we face rising food costs. The tiered system for reimbursement was first created in 1996, and since that time, family child care participation in CACFP has dropped by 60%. In comparison, Head Start and center-based participation has increased nearly 82%.¹

State agencies, in partnership with trusted sponsoring non-profit organizations, provide support and oversight including through monitoring, technical assistance, and training on the importance of good nutrition. Family child care can only participate in CACFP through such a sponsor. Across the country there are a wide range of sponsors in both the private and public sector supporting CACFP centers and programs.

- CACFP Roundtable [blog about the two-tier system for family child care in CACFP](#)
- FRAC [resource page on CACFP](#)
- Home Grown [blog about child care and nutrition investments](#)
- National CACFP Sponsors Association [blog about CACFP and the child care infrastructure](#)
- National CACFP Sponsors Association [blog about equitable payment needed in CACFP](#)

In addition to early childhood and school-age after-school programs, CACFP also provides reimbursement for meals and snacks served in adult day care centers and emergency shelters (homeless, domestic violence, and runaway youth shelters).

¹ Food Research and Action Center analysis of USDA data, 2022