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Northwest Harvest
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Northwest Harvest Applauds Bill Designed to Strengthen School Meals, WIC, Child Care Food, and Other Child Nutrition Programs

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON – On Thursday, July 28, the House Education & Labor Committee reviewed and passed the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act (H.R. 8450), the Committee’s much-anticipated Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill. It is a [comprehensive plan](#) that will increase access to school meals, summer meals, and childcare meals like never before.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity for households with children has hit historic highs, with a [disproportionate](#) impact on Black, Latinx, and Native American households.

“Temporary COVID-era supports, including year-round universal school meals in every community, Pandemic EBT that provided grocery assistance in response to COVID school closures, and modernizations to the Women, Infant, and Children Program (WIC) have been tested and proven effective in preventing child hunger from rising to even higher levels,” says Christina Wong, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at Northwest Harvest. “The Child Nutrition Reauthorization has not happened since 2010, which means this moment is crucial to take action to address childhood hunger by making these changes permanent.”

Among many provisions, the Act would

- dramatically increase children’s access to free school meals by expanding community eligibility which would allow more high-need schools to offer free meals to all students at no charge and expand direct (automatic) certification to include Medicaid;
- provide critical protections for children and families with unpaid school meal fees and require school districts to take steps to determine if families who are accruing school lunch debt are eligible for free or reduced-price meals;
- significantly expand access to summer meals and create a nationwide Summer EBT program, a complementary approach that would help close the summer hunger gap;
- give the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) waiver authority during federally declared emergencies;
- allow for an additional reimbursable meal for children in a full day of care, helping to provide the full complement of meals young children need to grow and thrive;
- modernize the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) by requiring WIC clinics to offer services over the phone and via video options and allow remote benefit issuance;
- extend WIC benefits to children up to 6 years old, and extend certification periods to two years for infants, children, and postpartum individuals; and
- create a pilot program to allow Tribal governments to express their inherent sovereignty in the space of food and agriculture by administering child nutrition programs.

Washington's Congressional delegation has led the way for years in demanding and showing strong bipartisan support for many of these changes. We thank Sen. Patty Murray (Stop Child Hunger Act, S. 1831 / H.R. 3519), Rep. Rick Larsen (Summer Meals Act, S. 1170 / H.R. 783), Rep. Jamie Herrera Beutler (Early Child Nutrition Improvement Act, H.R.5919), and Rep. Kim Schrier (Wise Investments in Children Act, S.853 / H.R.2011) for being original co-sponsors on bills that have been incorporated into this omnibus legislation.

We also want to thank Rep. Pramila Jayapal for her work advocating for universal school meals and expanding supports for unhoused youth to access nutritious meals. These critical investments will help end childhood hunger, improve health and development, and support positive academic outcomes. Northwest Harvest enthusiastically supports this plan and urges the House to pass this bill so it can move to the Senate floor after August recess.

Hungry children can't wait.

About Northwest Harvest:

Northwest Harvest is an anti-racist, anti-oppression food justice organization supporting people and community partners to address food insecurity and end hunger in Washington through policy change and food distribution. Learn more at northwestharvest.org and @NWHarvest on social media. It takes more than food to end hunger.

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