

How to end child hunger — permanently

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A long line outside the Northwest Harvest SODO Community Market in Seattle. The agency is experiencing a surge in demand from those who have never used a food bank before. (Courtesy Northwest Harvest)

By [Thomas Reynolds](#) and [Loria Yeadon](#)

COVID-19 isn't the only public health crisis that continues to challenge our economic recovery — child hunger is, too.

According to the [WA Food Study](#) from the University of Washington, food insecurity for families with children has doubled since last spring to 1 in 3 families. During the pandemic, families of color are 1.5 times more likely to struggle with hunger, worsening preexisting racial disparities.

Congressional action has brought essential temporary supports that have helped put families on a path to recovery — rental assistance, increased Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or Basic Food) benefits and the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC). Additionally, schools are allowed to serve free meals to all children and low-income families have Pandemic

Electronic Benefits Transfer cards to buy groceries.

As members of Gov. Jay Inslee's Start Safe Advisory Group for Support Services, our charge was to identify solutions to close long-existing gaps, not just those created by COVID-19. Washington's future will be brighter when we sustainably focus our attention on those furthest from opportunity. That is why Congress must make these policies permanent.

Congressional action is helping to reduce the extreme economic hardship felt by millions of people and decreasing child hunger. Before the pandemic, over half a million Washington students received free or reduced-price school meals. The expanded Child Tax Credit is currently providing families an average monthly payment of \$300-\$350, boosting spending in local economies and meeting basic needs. Initial studies show that the first round of CTC payments has decreased child hunger rates by nearly 24%. As a result, food hardship for families with children is now at a pandemic-era low.

But these federal measures are only temporary, and we know the need will outlast their sunset dates. We can shorten pathways out of poverty, getting us to a future where we are healthier and stronger together, but we must have the political will now to make once in a lifetime investments to secure our collective prosperity.

This month, members of Congress are home to listen to constituents and soon, they'll be back at the Capitol to forge agreement on a budget. Megan, a mother of three in Shelton, wants Congress to know how critical these investments have been for her family. Due to disabilities from a car accident, Megan struggles on wages from temporary jobs. "Knowing my child will be able to eat at school is one less thing I have to worry about," she said. "Receiving the child tax credit monthly makes it possible for me to focus on loving and teaching my children, instead of stressing about which bills I will be able to pay."

If Congress takes the generation-changing opportunity now to make these changes permanent, we'll have a fighting chance at ending child hunger once and for all. We can drastically cut child poverty with a Child Tax Credit that ensures families have money to meet family needs, universal free school meals and additional food assistance for kids when schools are closed for breaks and disasters, as provided by U.S. Sen. Patty Murray's Stop Child Hunger Act.

The budget reconciliation process may be complicated, but Congress can take simple, proven steps to assure a recovery that doesn't leave families behind. This is the opportunity of a lifetime to disrupt intergenerational poverty and hunger, close racial disparities in children's health and academic success, and propel us into a more vibrant future where more of us can thrive. Join us in advocating for children and families, sending the clear message to Congress: Make the Child Tax Credit permanent, pass the Stop Child Hunger Act, and show we no longer tolerate child hunger.

***Thomas Reynolds** is the CEO of Northwest Harvest, the statewide hunger-relief and food-justice agency focused on equitable access to nutritious food for all our Washington neighbors.*

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