

# The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act

## H.R. 1332 - Summary

Supporters: *Food Research and Action Center (FRAC); American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); National Women’s Law Center; National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC); ZERO TO THREE; Early Care and Education Consortium; RESULTS: The Power to End Poverty; Common Sense Kids Act; Child Care Aware of America; National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); National CACFP Forum; Child Care Food Program Roundtable; Service Employees International Union (SEIU)*

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### **The Program:**

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburses child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start programs, afterschool programs, homeless shelters, and nonresidential adult day care centers for serving nutritious meals. Approximately 4.3 million children and 130,000 adults benefit each day from the program.

Meals served to children in participating child care centers and homes contain less fat and more nutrients than meals served in other facilities. Federal support for nutritious meals also helps child care providers control costs that are typically passed on to families, helping make high-quality child care accessible.

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### **The Problem:**

Households with children have higher rates of food insecurity, which affects more than 15 million children in America. Given the prevalence of food insecurity—as well as high rates of childhood obesity—there is a clear need to provide nutritious meals and form healthy eating habits in child care.

Although meals served at CACFP-participating facilities help combat hunger, support good nutrition, and prevent obesity, the challenges of complying with the program have contributed to a 45 percent decline in participation among family child care homes. These providers have seen their participation drop from nearly 200,000 homes in 1996 to approximately 108,000 homes in 2016—jeopardizing access to quality care for working families in many communities.

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### **The Legislation:**

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act will strengthen CACFP’s ability to serve low-income children. The bill allows the option of an additional meal or snack for children in care for a full day, reduces paperwork, streamlines program operations, and helps child care providers continue to operate effectively.

The bill authorizes reimbursements for an additional meal:

Currently, child care providers can be reimbursed for serving two meals and one snack; however, many working families rely on child care providers for full-day service. The bill authorizes reimbursements to child care providers who offer a third meal to children who are in care for more than eight hours.

The bill consolidates reimbursement rates for child care providers:

Today, the federal government uses separate consumer price indexes to calculate adjustments for reimbursement rates for family child care homes and child care centers. Although the indexes were meant to reflect differences in prices for food served at home versus food served in a center, both groups of providers must follow the same meal requirements. The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act eliminates complexity by authorizing a single formula for adjusting reimbursement rates for all child care providers in the program.

The bill reduces paperwork for parents and child care providers:

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act authorizes an expert advisory committee to make recommendations for using technology and reducing unnecessary paperwork and duplicative recordkeeping requirements for parents and providers.

The bill simplifies participation for proprietary centers:

For-profit child care centers are eligible to participate in the CACFP program if at least 25 percent of the children they serve are low-income. Many providers operate small child care centers and afterschool programs that offer care to low-income children in underserved areas, supporting early learning and allowing parents to work. Currently, these centers must certify eligibility each month, even though many are well above the 25-percent threshold. The bill would allow centers to certify eligibility every six months, reducing the time and money these providers spend on paperwork.

The bill clarifies the CACFP program's requirements:

The bill requires the Department of Agriculture to review the rules of the CACFP program and issue clearer guidelines, so fewer child care providers accidentally violate the program's requirements. The bill also seeks to improve the process for correcting incidents of noncompliance, so providers acting in good faith are not terminated from the program.