

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act

Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) and Rep. Marcus Molinaro (R-NY)

Endorsements: American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), American Heart Association, Bipartisan Policy Center, CACFP Roundtable, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), Child Care Aware of America, Children's Institute, Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC), Feeding America, First Children's Finance, First Five Years Fund, First Focus Campaign for Children, Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), Home Grown, Independent Restaurant Coalition, KidKare by Minute Menu, KinderCare, National Association for Family Child Care, National CACFP Sponsors Association, National Child Care Association, National Head Start Association, National Women's Law Center, Oregon Food Bank, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), YMCA of the USA, and ZERO TO THREE

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. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that CACFP serves more than 4.2 million children and 138,000 adults daily.

The Problem:

Millions of children nationally experience food insecurity and there is a clear need to provide nutritious meals and instill healthy eating habits in child care settings.

Meals served at CACFP-participating facilities improve food security, support good nutrition, and prevent obesity, but burdensome and unnecessary requirements have contributed to a 30 percent decline in children served by CACFP.

Child care providers are facing rising food costs while COVID-19 pandemic resources are expiring, creating a crisis that will lead to closures and increased costs to families. According to a [recent report](#) by The Century Foundation, the expiration of ARPA funding could cause 3.2 million children to lose their child care slots and more than 70,000 providers will be forced to close their doors.

The Legislation:

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act will strengthen CACFP's ability to serve children, support parents returning to work, and reduce costs for child care providers. The legislation 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.

Provides 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 their care for more than eight hours.

Streamlines reimbursement rates & increases funding for family child care businesses:

Under current law, 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 authorizes a single formula for adjusting reimbursement rates for all child care providers in the program.

Reduces paperwork for parents & child care providers:

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act creates an expert advisory committee to make recommendations for using technology, including virtual visits for monitoring, and reducing unnecessary paperwork and duplicative recordkeeping requirements for parents and providers.

Simplifies participation:

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 for-profit providers operate small child care centers and afterschool programs that offer care to low-income children in underserved areas. 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 annually, reducing the time and money spent on paperwork.

Clarifies CACFP's requirements:

The bill requires USDA to review the rules of the CACFP 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 to prevent providers acting in good faith from being terminated from the program.