

The EASY Access to Meals and Snacks Act

The Ensuring All Students Year-round (EASY) Access to Meals and Snacks Act, H.R. 4274, introduced by Representatives Rick Larsen (D-WA) and Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO), would allow local government agencies and private nonprofit organizations to feed children meals and snacks 365 days a year—after school, on weekends and school holidays, and during the summer—through the Summer Food Service Program. This bill would expand the year-round program that currently is being piloted in California and would allow organizations to operate one child nutrition program throughout the year.

What is the year-round program?

- The year-round program currently is being piloted in California. It allows local government agencies (not including schools) and private nonprofit organizations to operate the Summer Food Service Program during both the summer and the school year.
- In all other states, these organizations must switch back and forth between the Summer Food Service Program and another child nutrition program—the Child and Adult Care Food Program—if they want to feed children during the school year and the summer. This creates a tremendous amount of unnecessary administrative work for programs that operate throughout the year, deterring participation for potential sponsors.
- Programs that are located in low-income areas—where 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals—can participate in the year-round program. The program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Meals and snacks must meet federal nutrition standards.

What does the EASY Access Act propose?

- The Act would allow afterschool providers in all states to provide nutritious meals and snacks year-round through the Summer Food Service Program, instead of operating another child nutrition program to feed children during the school year. This will reduce significantly the administrative burden on community-based organizations, resulting in more organizational participation and improved access for low-income children to nutritious meals and snacks every day of the year.
- The Act also would improve on the existing California pilot by allowing organizations to serve a meal and a snack during the school year. The pilot only provides funding for a snack during the school year, which is not enough nutrition to keep children focused and engaged for very long. Many low-income children need a meal and a snack after school and on weekends or school holidays.

How will the EASY Access Act benefit my community?

- Reduce child hunger. In 2008, the number of children who lived in food insecure households grew to nearly 17 million, which means that one in four children lived in households that struggled against hunger. These children are in desperate need of nutritious meals and snacks every day of the year.
- Enhance children's learning. The snacks and meals allow children to stay focused and engaged during educational and enrichment programs that operate after school, on weekends and school holidays, and during the summer.
- Support out-of-school time programs. Nowadays, most community-based organizations provide programming for children year-round in order to support working families. By creating a year-round nutrition program, the federal nutrition programs are better able to meet the needs of the community.
- Bring federal child nutrition funding into states. Expanding access to meals and streamlining the programs would significantly increase the amount of federal child nutrition funding available in states.

How does the EASY Access Act complement other child nutrition priorities?

- The EASY Access Act will streamline out-of-school time nutrition programs for nonprofit organizations and local government agencies that operate nutrition programs year-round. The Act will expand children's access to nutritious food by making the program easier to operate and by allowing afterschool programs in all states to serve a meal after school, on weekends, and on school holidays.
- For schools, the Afterschool Meal Act, S.990/H.R.3321 (which was recently introduced in Congress) will expand the Afterschool Meal Program nationwide and streamline the administrative process for *schools* that provide nutritious food in afterschool programs.
- Together, the EASY Access Act and the Afterschool Meal Act will expand access to the nutritious food that children need by decreasing the administrative burden for all providers and expanding the Afterschool Meal Program nationwide.