



BOB CASEY

FIGHTING *for* PENNSYLVANIA FAMILIES

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act of 2024

U.S. Senator Bob Casey

Working families' budgets are getting [crunched](#) at the grocery store. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) ensures children in care settings are fed healthy meals throughout the day. On any given day, the program serves approximately 4.6 million American children nutritious meals. However, outdated program rules are holding back participation and holding back providers from serving needed food to children in their care. At present, CACFP providers can only serve two meals and a snack to children per day. Two meals and a snack is simply not enough for the child of working parents who must leave them in child care for full day. Additionally, burdensome paperwork holds back providers, preventing participation and saddling participating organizations with paperwork. And due to the misalignment of reimbursement rate increases, many child care homes are struggling to afford participation in CACFP.

Children in care centers should be provided every opportunity for a healthy start. The [research](#) is clear, higher meal frequency is directly related to a higher quality diet. This is true for adults and children—both of which participate in CACFP. Streamlining eligibility criteria for some providers and reducing paperwork will attract more child care centers to the program, meaning more working families will [have access](#) to nutritious meals for their children.

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act would make several improvements to CACFP to make it work better for children, families, and child care centers. Specifically, this bill would:

- allow care providers to serve an additional meal or snack to children in their care for more than eight hours;
- order USDA to study the impact of providing an additional meal on children, families, the viability of child care and afterschool programs, and the local economy;
- align CACFP reimbursement rate increases for child care homes to the consumer price index for food away from home to better track with increasing prices and create parity within the program;
- require USDA to conduct a review of the serious deficiency process, which identifies care providers that are out of compliance with CACFP rules;
- streamline eligibility criteria for private care providers to allow them to certify on an annual basis instead of monthly; and
- establish an advisory committee on paperwork reduction to reduce unnecessary or duplicative paperwork.

Cosponsors

This bill is cosponsored by Senators Fetterman, Blumenthal, and Reed.

Supporting Organizations

The bill is endorsed by more than 30 organizations including American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), Home Grown, National CACFP Sponsors Association, and ZERO TO THREE.