

ENDING CHILDHOOD HUNGER

A STATE LEGISLATOR'S CHECKLIST



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PRACTICES

State legislators can play a pivotal role in addressing childhood hunger in their state. They can use their influence to raise awareness about the issue; pass legislation that supports program expansion and efficiency; encourage legislative studies related to addressing childhood hunger; and work with state agencies to ensure that effective policies are in place. This checklist outlines a range of options that legislators can take to address child hunger.

GENERAL ACTION TO END CHILDHOOD HUNGER

Nearly 1 in 5 children are at risk of hunger in this country. Hungry kids are more likely to experience serious short- and long-term health issues. They tend to have trouble learning and are more prone to behavioral and emotional problems. Legislators can take a number of steps to increase awareness about childhood hunger and make addressing it a priority.



❑ Know the facts

National and local anti-hunger organizations and food banks can be a resource for finding out more about childhood hunger in your state. For state-level statistics on food insecurity and program participation visit the State of Hunger Map at [BestPractices.NoKidHungry.org](https://www.bestpractices.org/en/projects/10000)

❑ Raise awareness

Legislators can speak publicly about the issue of childhood hunger, publish an op-ed in a local newspaper, or join existing national efforts to raise awareness. For example, in 2015 State Senator Thomas Alexander (R-Oconee) sponsored the proclamation of September as Hunger Awareness and Action Month in **South Carolina**, and State Senator Dinniman (D-Chester) introduced a resolution recognizing June 2014 as National Hunger Awareness Month in **Pennsylvania**.

❑ Host a roundtable or town hall meeting on childhood hunger

Legislators can convene a meeting of public and private stakeholders to learn about childhood hunger in the state and discuss best practices in addressing it. **Ohio** State Senator Eric H. Kearney (D-Cincinnati) hosted a town hall meeting on Childhood Hunger.

❑ Establish a task force or workgroup to address childhood hunger

Establish a committee or multi-sector task force to develop and monitor a plan to end childhood hunger. The **Illinois** Commission to End Hunger is comprised of legislators and community leaders who have committed themselves to developing an action plan to end hunger in the state. In 2014, the **Maine** legislature passed legislation creating the Task Force to End Student Hunger in Maine to explore ways to increase student access to food.

SUMMER MEALS

Summer is a critical time for children's academic and physical well-being; during the summer children are at a higher risk of both obesity and hunger. While federal programs exist to help fill the gap of free and reduced-price lunches during the school year, they only reach a fraction of kids in low-income communities. To tackle summer hunger, legislators can:

❑ Raise awareness

A national survey of low-income parents revealed that only 40 percent were aware of free summer meals programs. Legislators can help raise awareness and promote the program to families in their districts and states by recording PSAs or robo calls; promoting summer meals hotlines and texting numbers on their websites and ensuring information is posted on state government websites; and using social media to promote summer meals programs. Legislators can also visit summer meals sites in their districts and participate in summer launches.

❑ Work with your community to establish summer sites

Legislators can work with faith and community leaders, schools and local officials to ensure that there are enough accessible summer meals sites in their districts. State agencies can provide a list of summer meals programs and identify underserved areas.

❑ Support a plan for summer meals expansion

States that have established clear goals for participation, and convened public and private stakeholders to develop and implement a plan for expansion have been able to increase the reach of the program. Legislators can take a lead in convening stakeholders or encourage the state agency to do so and provide an update on progress to the legislature.

❑ Sponsor legislation

State legislatures can allocate funding to encourage site expansion and implementation of programming, require participation in high-need areas, and make changes to enhance administrative efficiencies. For example, **Florida** requires participation in the summer meals program for certain high-need school districts and **Oregon** allocated state funding to support programs to purchase equipment, meet health and safety regulations, provide program activities, or fund outreach activities and materials. For more information, see NoKidHungry.org/SummerPolicy

SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM

Children who eat a good breakfast tend to perform better in school, have better attendance, and exhibit fewer behavior problems. They develop healthy eating habits, visit the school nurse less frequently, and are less likely to be obese. School breakfast programs have been shown to have positive academic, health and behavior benefits for students. The most effective way to increase access to the School Breakfast Program is to make it a part of the school day through models such as Breakfast in the Classroom. There are several actions legislators can take to ensure students have access to a healthy breakfast at the start of their school day:



❑ Raise awareness

Legislators can raise awareness about the importance of the School Breakfast Program by visiting schools serving effective breakfast programs, celebrating National School Breakfast Week, and passing resolutions in support of making school breakfast a part of the school day. For example, the **Illinois** legislature adopted a resolution that encourages schools participating in the School Breakfast Program to utilize alternative delivery models, such as Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab n' Go, and Second Chance Breakfast, to provide breakfast after the bell to all students at no cost to students.

❑ Sponsor a School Breakfast Challenge

Several states have sponsored school breakfast challenges to incentivize schools to improve participation in school breakfast by offering cash prizes to those who achieve the biggest gains. Breakfast challenges are typically public-private partnerships with private organizations providing funding and technical assistance and public officials issuing the challenge to schools and promoting the effort.

❑ Ensure effective implementation of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

CEP makes it easier for high-need schools to serve breakfast and lunch to students by removing the need for schools to collect paper applications. Legislators can work with their state Department of Education to ensure that CEP is a priority and request updates on implementation progress. They can also reach out to high-need schools in their districts to ensure that they are aware of, and pursuing, CEP. Legislatures in **Arkansas** and **Maryland** passed bills that ease implementation by ensuring that state education funding—typically tied to free and reduced-price eligibility—is not affected by CEP. For a database of eligible schools in your state, see <http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/community-eligibility-database-schools-that-can-adopt-community-eligibility>

❑ Sponsor legislation

Legislatures in **New Mexico**, **Colorado** and **Nevada** passed laws requiring that high need schools implement “Breakfast after the Bell” programs, making school breakfast a part of the school day. **Arkansas**, **Maryland**, and **Virginia** have also allocated state funds available through a competitive process to support schools implementing breakfast after the bell models. For more information see NoKidHungry.org/BreakfastPolicy

AFTERSCHOOL MEALS

In a national survey of low-income parents, a quarter worry that their children do not have enough to eat between lunch and breakfast the following day. The At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program provides children with healthy meals in a supervised setting. Schools, faith and community-based organizations, and other organizations that offer enrichment activities in high-need areas can operate the program. To raise awareness and increase access to this important program, legislators can:

❑ Raise awareness

The afterschool meals program is one of the newest child nutrition programs and many parents and program providers are not aware of it. Legislators can promote the program on their websites or through social media, visit programs to raise community awareness, and encourage schools in their district to inform students about existing programs.

❑ Work with your schools to operate afterschool meals programs

Schools are typically the best equipped to operate the afterschool meal program because they are trusted by parents, have the resources and staff, and often offer activities after school. Legislators can work with schools to ensure that there are enough accessible afterschool meals sites in their districts.

❑ Sponsor legislation

State legislatures can allocate funding to encourage site expansion and implementation of programming, require participation in high-need areas, and make changes to enhance administrative efficiencies. For example, **Oregon** allocated state funding for grants to school districts, community organizations, and government agencies to purchase or upgrade equipment, comply with sanitation requirements, conduct outreach, or fund program activities. For more information, see NoKidHungry.org/AfterschoolPolicy



ABOUT THE NO KID HUNGRY CENTER FOR BEST PRACTICES

Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry® campaign is ending childhood hunger by connecting kids to the healthy food they need, every day; teaches families how to cook healthy, affordable meals through Cooking Matters®; and invests in community organizations that fight hunger. The No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices provides the tools and resources needed to help elected officials and their staff, educators and community leaders achieve success in fighting childhood hunger. Learn what works in the fight against childhood hunger and discover toolkits, case studies, hunger stats, issue briefs, reports and more at BestPractices.NoKidHungry.org.

