

SB 1481 (Becker) Food with Care

**Free Meals for All Kids.
Fair Pay for Child Care Providers.**

The Problem

Federal rules for child care meal programs don't reflect California's true level of poverty—keeping many children from accessing nutritious, affordable meals. For example, a family of four must make less than \$34,060 a year in order for a child care center to serve a free meal.

Child care providers take the hit financially for federal rules that don't take into account California's high cost of living. Each year, providers absorb tens of millions of dollars in costs for meals served to children who don't qualify for free meals, but who need them all the same.

The harm to children and the burden on providers is exacerbated by state policies that financially penalize child care providers for feeding younger children. Existing statute creates a pay penalty that limits providers to only 75% of the state reimbursement for meals served. The pay penalty is the result of a racist legacy of child care laws—still in place today— that undercompensate labor historically performed by Black, Latina, and immigrant women.

The Opportunity

The federal child care meal program, with adequate funding and support, has the power to fill the gap in equitable access to healthy meals in child care while supporting the financial stability of the child care workforce.

Take Action

- Enable all child care providers to qualify for reimbursements equivalent to the highest federal rate for meals served in the federal child care meal program.
- Lift the child care meal pay penalty.
- Make strategic investments in start-up and expansion grants.

Why This Matters

California recently became the first state in the nation to expand free meals to all K-12 students. It's time to make a similar investment in our youngest learners.

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