



Senate Bill 250

Child Hunger Prevention and Fair Treatment Act of 2017

As Introduced February 8, 2017

SUMMARY

SB 250 will ensure that school officials do not delay or deny food to punish students for any reason and would require districts to publish their policies for notifying and collecting debts from parents who have not paid school meal fees.

ISSUE

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is one of the most important federal programs to combat child hunger and improve school attendance and outcomes. California children of families with incomes below 130% of the Federal Poverty Line attending public schools are entitled to a meal funded through the NSLP. In most schools, children who do not qualify for the NSLP or whose parents have not applied for the program must pay for a meal at either a reduced price or the full price. It is a common practice in school cafeterias to provide to all students who request one, even those who are not enrolled in the NSLP and arrive without money; the debt is later collected from the parent or guardian. Still, not all children in California who are eligible for assistance are enrolled and some families still find themselves without enough money to pay the modest price for school lunches.

In recent years, there have been reports of students who are punished and publicly shamed for the school meal debt that went unpaid by their parent or guardian. Some schools are taking food away from students for debts as low as 30 cents. Children are left hungry and may go an entire day without food. While it is rare to find this happening in California, lack of a standard statewide policy puts children in harm's way and puts school workers, who are often forced to make these decisions, in a bad position with little or no guidance.

SB 250 (Hertzberg)

The United States Department of Agriculture, the agency in charge of NSLP, has recently completed a two-year long workgroup on unpaid school meals and appropriate collection practices. Following their conclusions, SB 250 ensures that school officials do not delay or deny food to punish students whose parents have unpaid school meal fees. The bill also provides that students will not be shamed for the debt that is the responsibility of their parent or guardian.

SUPPORT

Western Center on Law and Poverty (Sponsor)
Children's Defense Fund-California (Co-sponsor)