

Military Dependents School Meal Eligibility Act

Reps. Mike Levin (D-CA), Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), Sanford Bishop (D-GA), and Richard Hudson (R-NC) introduced the *Military Dependents School Meal Eligibility Act* to ensure that children of active duty servicemembers have access to school meal programs.

➤ Background

There is a significant gap between the number of military families that report food insecurity and those who have access to nutrition assistance programs. Over 60 percent of military families report feeling stress from their financial situation, and nearly one in seven military families report experiencing food insecurity.¹ In recent years, only 1.5 percent of the active force received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.²

Federal programs such as National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) provide millions of low-income children with school breakfasts and lunches every day. However, multiple barriers keep military families from participating in these programs. Participants qualify based on family income, but servicemembers' housing allowance is considered income and pushes them out of eligibility. Military families also frequently relocate, and additional applications and paperwork dissuade families from applying.³

Access to food security programs would support children's success in schools, alleviate financial stress for military families, and allow active duty servicemembers to focus on serving our nation.

➤ Legislation

The *Military Dependents School Meal Eligibility Act* would:

- Eliminate basic allowance for housing (BAH) from the calculation of military income, ensuring more military families have access to free- and reduced-price school meals.
- Qualify almost all children of entry-level, active duty servicemembers for lunch programs, up through ranks E-6.
- Enable the Department of Defense (DoD) to share family eligibility with school districts, for families to directly certify for free or reduced-price school meals.
- Increase the percentage of directly certified students in schools, making schools more eligible for the community eligibility provision, which offers free meals to all students.
- Reduce food insecurity for military families and improve the health and academic outcomes for military children.

➤ Endorsements

- Blue Star Families
- Fleet Reserve Association
- AMVETS
- National Education Association (NEA)
- MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
- School Nutrition Association
- California Association of Food Banks
- Food Research Action Network (FRAC)
- Feeding America
- Alliance to End Hunger
- San Diego Hunger Coalition
- Military Child Education Coalition
- Service Women's Action Network

¹ Blue Star Families, https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018MFLS-Comprehensive-Infographic_v2.pdf

² U.S. Census, <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/time-series/acsbr.All.html/>

³ Food Research & Action Center, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/direct-cert-improves-low-income-school-meal-access.pdf>