



UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON
**AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
& FORESTRY**

U.S. SENATOR DEBBIE STABENOW, CHAIRWOMAN

The Support Kids Not Red Tape Act

At the onset of the pandemic, Congress gave USDA flexibility in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to issue a number of waivers so that schools and meal program operators could have the flexibility they need to continue to feed children. Congress has previously extended these flexibilities to address ongoing challenges. Without further Congressional action, these flexibilities are slated to expire on June 30, 2022, and schools and families will lose a lifeline upon which they have relied.

The bipartisan Support Kids Not Red Tape Act would extend the flexibilities for an additional two summers and the 2022-2023 school year to give schools and families time to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic while transitioning back to normal meal operations.

How do the waivers support schools, program operators, and families?

Waivers have been a lifeline for schools and families throughout the pandemic and have provided a wide range of flexibilities.

- For families, this means that more children can get free meals over the summer, and often in a more flexible way, such as being able to pick up a week's worth of meals, or having meals delivered to their home on the school bus.
- For children in rural communities where traditional meals sites are often far away from families' homes, this flexibility helps sponsors provide meals to children where they are.
- During the school year, this means that all children can get free meals without having to fill out paperwork, and parents can pick up meals at the school when needed for virtual learners.

This also provides support for schools.

- Many schools are short staffed and struggling to manage the added burden of supply chain disruptions. With the flexibilities waivers provide, school food service operators do not have to spend time on burdensome paperwork and can focus instead on feeding children and building healthy meals.
- The increased reimbursement also helps defray the cost of supply chain issues that make sourcing food staples unpredictable and costly.
- Waivers also allow the flexibility for year-round operations, under the Seamless Summer Option, so schools can keep feeding children in the school year and summer without having to switch operations.

What happens if flexibilities aren't extended?

The most immediate impact will be on the summer meals program this summer. Operators are already trying to make decisions about whether to move forward with summer sites. Without flexibilities, many sites across the country will no longer be able to serve all children in the community. This not only reduces the number of kids that can be served, but also may result in some sites shutting down altogether due to the increased paperwork burden to operate. This will end flexible delivery options, like mobile delivery, and make it harder for children to access meals.

For schools, they will have to begin collecting paperwork and determining eligibility for all students which will require significant staff time for schools that are already short-staffed. Schools will also lose their higher reimbursement rate and USDA will be forced to follow normal National School Lunch Program rules on meal standards, which would not allow them to waive penalties if schools cannot meet meal standards despite continued supply chain issues.

What will this bill do?

The bipartisan Support Kids Not Red Tape Act would:

- Extend USDA's authority to issue waivers from June 30, 2022 to September 30, 2023. This is simply a continuation of the authority USDA has had and exercised throughout the pandemic. This would cover this summer, as well as the full 2022-2023 school year, and summer of 2023, and create a transition plan to help schools adjust back to normal school meal operations starting October 1, 2023.
- Direct states to submit a transition plan to USDA so that schools will be prepared and supported when transitioning back to normal National School Lunch Program operations after the increased flexibilities end.
- Direct the Secretary to provide technical assistance to states on drafting transition plans and to School Food Authorities on meeting meal standards during the waiver period.

Who's on the bill thus far?

In addition to lead Senators Stabenow (D-MI), Murkowski (R-AK), Heinrich (D-NM), Collins (R-ME), and Manchin (D-WV), additional cosponsors include Sens. Gillibrand (D-NY), Casey (D-PA), Van Hollen (D-MD), Smith (D-MN), Brown (D-OH), Baldwin (D-WI), Booker (D-NJ), Lujan (D-NM), Klobuchar (D-MN), Durbin (D-IL), Warnock (D-GA), Markey (D-MA), Hirono (D-HI), Duckworth (D-IL), Sanders (I-VT), Reed (D-RI), Leahy (D-VT), Wyden (D-OR), Shaheen (D-NH), Hassan (D-NH), Bennet (D-CO), Merkley (D-OR), Warren (D-MA), Padilla (D-CA), Warner (D-VA), Murray (D-WA), Cardin (D-MD), Coons (D-DE), Cortez Masto (D-NV), Carper (D-DE), Schatz (D-HI), Peters (D-MI), King (I-ME), Feinstein (D-CA), Rosen (D-NV), Menendez (D-NJ), Kaine (D-VA), Blumenthal (D-CT), Murphy (D-CT), Hickenlooper (D-CO), Whitehouse (D-RI), Kelly (D-AZ), Sinema (D-AZ), Ossoff (D-GA), Tester (D-MT), Schumer (D-NY), and Cantwell (D-WA).