



# The Hunger-Free Summer for Kids Act

## The Issue: Summer Hunger

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) helps to provide healthy and nutritious meals for nearly 537,000 children living in Wisconsin, including the nearly 300,000 children living in families with low-incomes who qualify for free and reduced priced meals. However in the summer, many of these children lose access to the meals they need to continue learning and developing while school is out of session.

The federal Summer Meals program (SFSP) attempts to address this problem by providing congregate summer feeding programs at sites while kids are not in school. However, the program has a poor participation rate compared to the participation of the School Lunch Program. About 300,000 Wisconsin children receive free or reduced price lunch every day during the school year but in the summer, only 41,000 Wisconsin children receive summer meals.

While many of these kids may be eating more meals at home, which may increase the household budget pressures of families already working hard to try to pay all of their bills, many of them may be eating with friends, relatives, or perhaps not eating at all.

One of the key barriers to feeding kids in the summer is the congregate requirement in SFSP. It mandates that meals must be served to kids in a group setting. While this works well in some settings, in others, such as rural settings, areas with extreme weather, or dangerous areas, requiring kids to congregate can be a barrier to access. In Wisconsin, only about 14% of the children who receive free or reduced price lunch during the school year also get a summer meal.

## The Hunger-Free Summer for Kids Act (S. 1966)

Introduced in the Senate by Senators Boozman (R-AR), McConnell (R-KY), Bennett (D-CO), Brown (D-OH), Donnelley (D-IN) and Kirk (R-IL), the Hunger-Free Summer for Kids Act would begin to ensure that all kids have access to healthy meals in or out of school by establishing a non-congregate option for states.

The “off-site consumption” option would give the states the option to provide children meals to be consumed off-site. Many of our food banks would be able to deploy their innovative programmatic assets such as backpack meal programs and mobile pantry programs to reach children living in rural communities who may not have access to a congregate feeding site. In addition, it would start a highly targeted Summer EBT program for families with children living in rural areas or areas that do not qualify for open summer food sites so that they have an extra supplement to buy the food they need to live healthier lives.

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