



March 18, 2022

Senator Josh Becker
1021 O Street
Suite 7250
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for SB 1481 —Food with Care: Free Nutritious Meals for All Children in Preschool and Child Care

Dear Senator Becker:

On behalf of Nourish California and CACFP Roundtable, we are writing to thank you for authoring SB 1481, which would ensure free meals for all kids in child care and fair reimbursement for providers. We are deeply appreciative of your vision and leadership, which builds upon the state's recent historic investments in child nutrition. California is now poised to become 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.

Yet the pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of and widened the gaps in our child care system, while simultaneously exacerbating food insecurity among households with young children. Child care providers have had to scramble to feed even hungrier kids, all while struggling with higher food costs, limited supplies, inconsistent enrollment, and inadequate support from the state.

The federal child care meal program brought more than 81 million breakfasts and lunches to kids in child care in 2019. However, underlying federal rules for the federal child care meal program 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.

The partial reimbursements provided by the federal child care meal program are a significant resource for child care providers. Yet, federal rules do not take into account California's high cost of living. Current rates of reimbursement are inadequate to cover operating costs for child care.



Each year California's high cost of living forces child care providers to 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 compounded 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 percent 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 underpays labor historically performed by Black, Latina, and immigrant women.

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

Parents need child care so they can go to work. Child care providers need financial stability to keep their doors open and serve children meals. This small investment works threefold as it ensures young children are served meals in child care, buoys the child care workforce, and enables parents to go back to work.

According to a recent Pew Research study, nearly half of workers with a child under 18 (48 percent), said “child care issues were a reason they quit a job.” This has kept women’s participation in the labor force below the levels it was at pre-pandemic.¹

SB 1481 is a timely investment in the our youngest children and our indispensable child care workforce, and would accomplish the following:

- **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;**
- **Finally eliminate the child care meal pay penalty; and**
- **Make strategic investments to support pandemic recovery through start-up and expansion grants (one-time funding).**

¹ Pew Research Center, March 2022, available at

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/>



Nutrition intervention in early childhood is a proven strategy for improving lifelong health, education, and general well-being of children in households with low income. This small investment will pay large dividends by putting hundreds of thousands of young children on a better path to a brighter future. At the same time, the state must ensure that we adequately support the financial stability of our essential child care workforce.

We are grateful for your leadership on this issue of critical importance to so many children, parents, and child care workers. We are proud to cosponsor your legislation and hope the rest of the legislature will join you in supporting SB 1481.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jared Call".

Jared Call, Senior Advocate
Nourish California
jared@nourishca.org

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samantha Marshall".

Samantha Marshall, Director of Programs & Policy
CACFP Roundtable
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