



2024 Legislative Priorities

Hunger Free New Jersey will continue to work to advance broad solutions to hunger, primarily focused on making it easier for struggling residents to receive federal food assistance and improving access to healthy food. In 2024, these overarching goals will be pursued through a variety of measures.

Childhood Hunger

New Jersey has always been on the forefront of child nutrition and has become a national model with programs like Breakfast After the Bell. 2022's passage of the Working-Class Families' Anti-Hunger Act, that will make over 25,000 more New Jersey students eligible for free school meals, continues New Jersey's tradition in leading the way on child nutrition programs. ***This past year was no different, with the passage of Assembly Bill 5684, which expanded access to free school meals to nearly 51 thousand more students.***

While great strides have been made to feed more New Jersey students, there are two programs that we could focus on to ensure we're able to meet the nutritional needs of New Jersey's children: the After School Meal Program, a part of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Like school breakfast and summer meals, afterschool meal programs provide federal dollars to feed hungry children, improving their health, well-being, and ability to succeed in school. From 2016 to 2019, the number of New Jersey children receiving afterschool snacks or suppers rose 21 percent. New Jersey falls short of reaching 15 children with suppers for every 100 low-income children participating in school lunch — a national benchmark set by the Food Research & Action Center. If New Jersey reached that goal, communities could collect an additional \$19.9 million in federal dollars.

CEP allows for schools across New Jersey and the nation to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at high-poverty schools at no charge while eliminating the traditional meal application process. Numerous districts in the state, like the Camden City School District, already take advantage of this program that can save school districts time, by reducing the administrative burden of collecting school meal applications. Schools also receive a higher reimbursement rate for each meal served under CEP than they would under the traditional meal programs, which allows enrolled schools and districts to focus more on children's health than worrying about their budgetary bottom line.

College Hunger

More than 1 in 3 college students struggled with food insecurity and hunger, and this issue has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. According to a recent HOPE Center #RealCollege survey, 39 percent of students at 2-year institutions and 29 percent of students at 4-year institutions struggled with food insecurity in New Jersey in 2018.

As the cost of tuition and housing continues to rise, more and more students are being financially squeezed, often struggling to complete their education, and put food on the table. Federal and state aid have not kept up with the skyrocketing cost of college, leaving students with more out of pocket expenses. In 1980, a Pell grant covered more than 75 percent of a student's costs at a public university, today it covers about 28 percent.

Often, students aren't aware of their eligibility for SNAP and other assistance programs. A new report from [The Hope Center](#) states that only 31% of college students nationwide who meet SNAP income limits reported receiving benefits. Some states are taking steps to ensure that all students that are likely eligible for SNAP know about the program, like California which recently passed [SB 20](#), requiring the California Student Aid Commission to notify students that they may be eligible for CalFresh benefits. While this cost-neutral legislation was only recently signed, a [2021 study](#) by the California Policy Lab that informed students of their eligibility for CalFresh benefits resulted in more than 7,000 new CalFresh applications from students in a year. They found that 3.7 percent of students who received two emails from the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) enrolled in CalFresh the same month, at a rate 2.2 percent higher than students who were not emailed at all.

Securing SNAP in the Upcoming Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a comprehensive piece of legislation that authorizes most federal policies governing food and agriculture programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The Farm Bill is reauthorized by Congress about every five years, offering policy makers an opportunity to review the programs included in the legislation and make programmatic changes.

Millions of low-income families and seniors gain access to healthy food through the Farm Bill nutrition programs each year. SNAP is the largest of the federal food assistance programs, and research shows that SNAP reduces food insecurity and poverty and is linked to improved outcomes in health, education, and economic success.

In New Jersey alone, over 857,000 residents were reached by SNAP in fiscal year 2022. More than 63% of SNAP participants in New Jersey are in families with children, and over 44% are in families with members who are seniors or disabled. In NJ, 55% of SNAP participants have an income below the poverty line.

In reauthorizing the Farm Bill, Congress must commit to strengthening SNAP and improving equitable access to this critical nutrition program.

For more information, contact Lisa Pitz at lpitz@cfnj.org.