



Senate Bill 265

Commitment to Child Hunger Prevention

As Introduced February 6, 2019

SUMMARY

SB 265 will guarantee that school officials do not establish or enforce meal charge policies that delay or deny food to punish students for any reason.

ISSUE

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is one of the most important federal programs to combat child hunger and improve school attendance and outcomes. California children of families with incomes below 130% of the Federal Poverty Line attending public schools and charter schools are entitled to a meal funded through the NSLP. In most schools, children who do not qualify for the NSLP, or whose parents have not applied for the program, must pay for a meal at either a full or reduced price. It is a common practice in school cafeterias to provide a meal to all students who request one, even those who are not enrolled in the NSLP and arrive without money; the debt is later collected from the parent or guardian. Still, not all children in California who are eligible for assistance enroll in the NSLP, and some families still find themselves without enough money to pay for school lunches.

In 2017, there was a statewide report showing that approximately one third of the largest school districts in the state had written meal charge policies instructing school lunch officials to take actions against a child that equated to public shaming of the child when school meal debt owed by their parent or guardian went unpaid. SB 250 (Hertzberg) made that practice illegal, but some schools are still maintaining policies that discriminate against children, denying children as young as 5 a meal or serving them an alternative meal because they didn't have lunch money that day. As a result, too many children are left hungry and with negative feelings about their learning environments.

SB 265 (Hertzberg)

SB 265 will build on SB 250 (Hertzberg, 2017), which established that schools could not treat a child differently than other children due to the debt owed by their parents. SB 265 ensures that meal charge policies established by school officials do not delay or deny food to punish students for any reason.

SUPPORT

Western Center on Law and Poverty (Co-Sponsor)
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