

# SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

## STATEMENT TO

### SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION No. 121

with committee amendments

# STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 1, 2022

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 121 with committee amendments.

As amended by the committee, this concurrent resolution respectfully urges Congress to provide for a permanent universal school meals program.

Families across the United States are struggling financially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the onset of food price inflation. In response to rapidly increasing childhood hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided a waiver that allowed all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, to receive breakfast and lunch for free. The meals provided during the pandemic increased access to safe and nutritious meals for millions of children. The temporary waivers from the USDA were not extended to the 2022-2023 school year, ending access to free meals for 10 million children.

School meals are essential to ensure that a child has the fuel necessary to learn, concentrate, and focus. A hungry child may have trouble concentrating, be easily distracted, or miss school entirely, all of which will have a negative impact on the child's academic performance. Providing free meals to all students has been shown to decrease the financial worries of a child's family while also reducing the stigma associated with free meal programs.

Over 150,000 New Jersey children who were eligible for free or reduced price school meals before the pandemic did not receive these meals due to a lack of awareness of the program or a lack of access. To provide broader access to food, it is necessary for Congress to enact legislation that would authorize the USDA to permanently extend the waivers provided during the COVID-19 pandemic and permanently provide free breakfast and lunch to all students nationwide.

#### COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the concurrent resolution to reflect in the preamble that USDA waivers allowing school meals to be served for free to all students regardless of a student's socioeconomic status have ended for the 2022-2023 school year. The committee amendments also

urge Congress to enact legislation that would authorize the USDA to permanently extend the school meal waivers that were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.