



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

CHRISTINA HENDERSON
Councilmember, At-Large
Chairperson, Committee on Health

Committee Member
Hospital and Health Equity
Judiciary and Public Safety
Transportation and the Environment

Statement of Introduction
Universal Free School Meals Amendment Act of 2023
January 13, 2023

Today, I am proud to introduce the Universal Free School Meals Amendment Act of 2023, along with Councilmembers Charles Allen, Zachary Parker, Robert C. White, Jr., Brooke Pinto, Brianne K. Nadeau, Vincent C. Gray, and Matthew Frumin. This legislation would provide free universal school breakfast, lunch, and after-school snacks to students in public, charter, and participating private schools in the District of Columbia.

For so many children in our city, schools serve as more than a place of learning; schools provide essential resources to students and families to support their overall wellbeing. The research on the benefits of having access to nutritional school meals is very clear. Students who receive free school meals have shown improved academic achievement, experienced lower obesity rates, consumed more fruits and vegetables, lowered risk of behavioral issues, and experienced reduced nutrition deficiencies. We also know that lack of nutritious meals disproportionately affects Black and Latinx children, with 21% of Black households and approximately 30% of Latinx households with children, reporting food insufficiency.¹

Prior to the pandemic 77% of the Districts' children received free or reduced-price school meals.² Two benefits would accrue for this population. The first would be that some families would no longer have to pay anything at all for receiving reduced-price lunches. The second being that concerns around the stigma associated with receiving this benefit would no longer be an issue. It is also important to highlight that this percentage does not cover all eligible families; some not applying for free or reduced priced school meals due to a variety of factors such as a language barrier or undocumented status. Additionally, federal guidelines for eligibility do not account for regional variations in the cost of living, meaning that many families in the District who would otherwise stand to benefit, cannot.

Currently, three states – Colorado, California, and Maine – have similar legislation in place, with several other states considering permanent legislation as well. The District should join this broader movement to provide free universal school meals. The D.C. Food Policy Council estimated that this legislation would have a relatively low-price tag of approximately \$8 million annually, as 86% of the cost for this bill would be covered by already existing federal and local reimbursements.³

¹ *The road ahead: 2021 Update on Food Access & Food Security in the District of Columbia* Building a more equitable, healthy, and sustainable District food system. (2022, May 4). <https://dcfoodpolicy.org/>

² <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/district-of-columbia>


³ <https://dcfoodpolicy.org/2022/12/16/universal-free-school-meals-in-dc/>




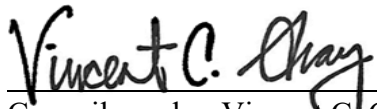
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I have been committed to reducing hunger and providing District residents with access to nutritious food during my time on the Council. My bill, Give SNAP A Raise, that passed in the last council period, will increase food security in the District, and subsequently improve health outcomes for both families and children. This legislation would further that work, ensuring that children are not hamstrung in any way due to hunger while in school.

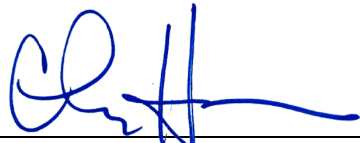
I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Council to pass this legislation and provide access to universal school meals across the District for all children.


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2 Councilmember Zachary Parker


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6 Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.


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10 Councilmember Vincent C. Gray

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14 Councilmember Brooke Pinto


Councilmember Christina Henderson


Councilmember Charles Allen


Councilmember Matthew Frumin


Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau

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18 AN ACT

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22 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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26 To provide universal free school meals and after school snacks to public school, public charter
27 school, and participating private school students in the District of Columbia.

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29 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this
30 act may be cited as the “Universal Free School Meals Act of 2023”.

31 Sec 2. The Healthy Schools Act of 2010, effective July 27, 2010 (D.C. Law 18-
32 20; D.C. Official Code § 38-822.01 *et seq.*), is amended by adding a new section 203b to read as
33 follows:

34 “Sec. 203b. Universal free school meals.

35 “(a) Beginning in School Year 2023-2024, and for every school year thereafter, public
36 schools, public charter schools, and private schools that participate in the National School Lunch

37 Program shall offer free breakfast, lunch, and after school snacks to all students, without
38 consideration of the student’s eligibility for a federally funded free or reduced-price meal.

39 “(b) The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (“OSSE”) shall reimburse
40 public schools, public charter schools, and participating private schools for meals provided to
41 students who are ineligible for a federally funded free or reduced-price meal.

42 “(c) OSSE shall ensure that all schools continue to receive federal reimbursements for
43 school meals for which they qualify, including the Community Eligibility Provision, the National
44 School Lunch Program, the National School Breakfast Program, and any available local
45 funding.

46 “(d) Reimbursements provided by OSSE shall not exceed the difference between the sum
47 of the amounts calculated for meals claimed based on the federal reimbursement rates for free
48 and reduced-price school meal and the full price of the meal provided to each student ineligible
49 for free and reduced-price meals.

50 “(e) OSSE shall provide training to school staff and administrators on how to implement
51 universal free school meals.

52 “(f) OSSE may issue rules to implement this section.”.

53 Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

54 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal
55 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,
56 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

57 Sec. 4. Effective date.

58 This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the
59 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as

60 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December
61 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of
62 Columbia Register.