

The Anti-Lunch Shaming Act of 2019

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For many students, meal shaming stands between them and their only meal of the day. No child should ever have to go to the school cafeteria and be publicly humiliated because they cannot afford their lunch. According to a 2014 report by the USDA, nearly half of all school districts used some form of lunch shaming to compel parents to pay for child's school meals. Often, students' hot lunches are taken away and replaced with an alternative meal, such as a cold cheese sandwich. In other cases, children are forced to do chores in front of their peers, made to wear wristbands or handstamps declaring their inability to pay, or have their lunch thrown out as their friends and classmates look on. Unfortunately, lunch shaming remains widespread and affects students in cafeterias across the country every day.

In March of 2017, New Mexico passed the first law in the United States to prohibit lunch shaming. This legislation gained national attention and spurred a number of other states to pass legislation combating lunch shaming. Some of the states that saw success include: Virginia, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Texas, Iowa, Washington, Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania; a variety of other state legislatures are currently considering measures to address this shameful practice. It is time that we put a stop to this draconian practice and ensure that students can focus on their studies.

The Anti-Lunch Shaming Act Summary:

Section 1. – Prohibition on Stigmatization of Children Who Are Unable to Pay for Meals:

- The bill amends the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and prohibits the discriminatory or stigmatizing treatment of children by schools when the child is unable to pay for their lunch. This prohibition ensures that a school food authority will not publically identify a child unable to pay or force a child to work for their meal.
- The legislation would require that a school food authority direct any communication pertaining to a child's outstanding meal credit balance to the child's parent(s) or guardian(s). This would be accomplished through a letter delivered to the parent(s) or guardian(s) via the child.

Section 2. – Sense of Congress:

- The sense of Congress would be directed at the Secretary of Agriculture and requests that the Secretary:
 - Ensure the annual distribution of understandable, uniform applications for free or reduce price lunches and encourage schools food authorities to offer assistance to complete the applications,
 - Coordinate with school food authorities and local education agency liaisons to ensure that homeless children and youth are eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch,
 - Coordinate with State agencies responsible for foster children and youth to ensure that both are eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch, and
 - Explore innovative ways to use technology to improve and coordinate communications between parent(s) or guardian(s) and school food authorities.