



Office of the Governor

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

Healthy Universal School Meals for Children Act

Senate Bill 4 – Sponsored by Senator Michael Padilla

School meals, like instructional materials, are an essential part of every child's school day, and kids cannot focus on learning if they are thinking about their next meal. For more than 80% of school-age children in New Mexico, school breakfast and school lunch provide as much as half of their daily calories. While New Mexico's food insecurity rates have seen nationally leading decreases under the Lujan Grisham administration, 1 in 5 children continue to have limited or uncertain access to healthy, high-quality food.

Gov. Lujan Grisham is investing in New Mexico children by expanding free, healthy meals to all students, regardless of family income. Securing free school meals for all sends a clear message that New Mexicans put our children first, and in turn, lead the way and do right by the next generation - while becoming one of the first states to set this policy in stone.

BENEFITS TO NEW MEXICO

- Protect the right of every child – regardless of income or geographic location – to healthy, no-cost breakfast and lunch while at school
- Eliminate the cost burden shouldered by families, schools, and school districts
- Improve academic and health outcomes for New Mexico children
- Generate economic investment in New Mexico agriculture

HOW IT WORKS

A \$32-million investment will eliminate school meal costs and ensure higher quality, healthy meals for more than 309,000 New Mexico children, making sure that hunger and nutrition are never again a barrier to learning. This proposal also invests in the renovation and improvement of school kitchens and levels the playing field for improved meal quality across the state, because every child deserves healthy meals.

Some key provisions include:

- Requiring public school districts and charter schools to offer high-quality, healthy meals at no cost to all students attending schools that operate the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.
- Setting meal quality improvement requirements that are tied to a performance-based reimbursement to incentivize healthier meals for all New Mexico students.
- Creating an additional funding opportunity for the purchase of New Mexico grown, raised, or processed agricultural products.
- Requiring at least 20 minutes of seated lunch time each day for students in grades K-5 so that lunch periods are long enough for young children to eat.
- Requiring that all schools rescue, repurpose and donate food that would otherwise go to waste.

WHY NOW

Federal waivers that made school meals universally free for two years expired last spring, leaving 69,740 New Mexico students without equal access to meals while at school. Waning support from the federal government paired with a growing expectation that school meals are a basic right of students while at school has resulted in a loss of critical revenues for school nutrition programs. (continued)

This year alone, New Mexico schools and school districts have reported more than \$1.2 million in unpaid meal debt.

A growing number of states have advanced legislation in the last year to ensure no cost meals for students. Similar legislation has passed with bipartisan support in Massachusetts, Vermont, California, Colorado, and Maine.

BUILDING ON OUR PROGRESS

In 2020, Gov. Lujan Grisham permanently eliminated student co-pays for reduced price breakfast and lunch and increased access to free meals for an additional 63,421 students. Still, 1 in 3 students are paying full-price for meals and more than 40% of New Mexico children that could qualify for full-price meals live in households under 400% of the Federal Poverty Level – there’s more work to do.

FOOD INITIATIVE BUDGET PRIORITIES

This year’s state budget recommendation includes more than \$75 million – the largest investment increase in food and agriculture in the state’s history – to continue to build a robust food system that grows, transports, and serves food to the New Mexicans that need it the most. Budget highlights include:

No Elder Hungry

- **State SNAP Supplement for Seniors and Disabled Individuals**, which provides an additional 42,487 seniors and disabled individuals with up to \$225 monthly. *Recommended funding: \$3.1 million for the Human Services Department.*
- **Food is Medicine: Medicaid-Funded Fruit and Vegetable Prescription and Medically Tailored Meals**, which funds home-delivered meals and healthy food prescription boxes to an additional 3,022 seniors. *Recommended funding: \$1.2 million for the Aging and Long-Term Services Department.*
- **Senior Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program**, which expands farmer’s market nutrition incentives for an additional 20,000 seniors through the Senior and WIC Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program. *Recommended funding: \$1 million for the Department of Health.*

Emergency Food Assistance and Innovation

- **Community Food Assistance Program**, which funds food bank, food pantry, and Tribal food assistance for 254,000 households across the state. *Recommended funding: \$10 million for the Human Services Department.*
- **College Food Security Program**, which provides grab and go healthy meals, low cost or free access to campus dining plans, and innovations to food distribution systems to support up to 17,500 food insecure students. *Recommended funding: \$1.5 million for the Higher Education Department.*

Farm, Ranch, and Food Business Success

- **New Mexico Grown**, which builds the market for farmers, ranchers, and food businesses to provide food to more than 284,000 individuals through schools, senior centers, and preschools. *Recommended funding: \$600,000 for the Aging and Long-Term Services Department, \$300,000 for the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, \$2 million for the Public Education Department.*
- **Farm and Ranch Development Program**, which invests in internships, apprenticeships, and training programs for more than 642 farmers, ranchers, and food businesses. *Recommended funding: \$2 million for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.*