



massachusetts
healthy
school
lunch
coalition

FACT SHEET

HEALTHIER SCHOOL LUNCHES

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCH BILL?

An Act Relative to Healthy School Lunches, sponsored by Sen. Jason Lewis and Rep. Michael Day, calls for strict limits on the amount of ultra-processed and disease-linked foods that can be sold and served in publicly-funded Massachusetts schools. It requires the majority of lunch entrées be composed of minimally processed, health-promoting foods like local whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, legumes, and other fiber-rich proteins. It also declares every March 21st Massachusetts Child Nutrition Day to educate and empower our children about healthy eating—starting with what's on their plate.

WHY ARE THESE CHANGES NECESSARY?

The health of our children is built on a foundation of high-quality nutrition; every meal they're served is an opportunity to help them build healthy habits for life. The companies that profit from serving school lunch play a big part in the development of our children's eating habits. As such, they have a responsibility to serve foods that promote the health and wellbeing of our children now and long into the future. Currently, many of the entrees served in Massachusetts public schools have worse nutritional profiles than fast food! With rates of diet-related diseases like type-2 diabetes and obesity rapidly rising in children, improving the healthfulness of menus in our schools is of critical importance. It's time we fight for not only food security, but *nutrition security* for all children.

WHY IS THE HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCH BILL IMPORTANT?

- Nearly 500,000 children in Massachusetts depend on school food service for up to half their daily nutrition needs. In some cases, children eat the same number of meals at school as dinners they consume at home.
- The average Bay State child's diet is made up of 60% ultra-processed food and food-type products.
- Meanwhile, 86% of children in Massachusetts fail to consume the minimum recommended amount of fruits and 89% are unable to eat enough vegetables. 2.8 million MA residents lack access to fresh produce.
- 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese, and nearly 20% of children under 17 have high cholesterol. Rates of diet-related diseases like obesity, asthma, and type-2 diabetes are on the rise in MA children
- In addition to physical health outcomes, research shows these diet-related diseases contribute to lower academic achievement, poorer test performance, increased absenteeism, and negatively impact mental health.
- Food service companies that contract with school districts profit from selling unhealthy foods to schools, despite having the ability to design healthier menus that still meet federal nutrition standards.
- Massachusetts spends more than \$15.4 Billion dollars treating chronic, lifestyle-related diseases each year.
- Districts where nutrition security and higher-quality meals are prioritized have demonstrated increases in school meal participation, higher rates of student satisfaction, and cost savings.
- There are currently no statewide nutrition standards for school lunch entrees in Massachusetts.

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