

HB1153/SB740 Advocate Talking Points

Tennessee 114th General Assembly: 2025-2026

Too many Tennessee kids are missing out on school meals.

- Hungry kids are in every county in Tennessee, which means [1 in 6 kids can't get enough food on a regular basis](#).
 - **274,320 Tennessee children are food insecure.**
- COVID-19 related waivers allowed Tennessee schools to serve meals to all kids at no cost to their families. When these waivers expired in June 2022, schools had to charge students if they didn't qualify for free meals. School lunch debt rose statewide, and participation has dropped in some schools.

Why are so many kids missing out?

- Some Tennessee students are left to fend for themselves in the cafeteria if they don't qualify for free or reduced-price meals. [Up to 1 in 5 hungry kids don't qualify for financial help with school meals](#). Means-tested programs always leave somebody behind.
- Many families' financial situations can change throughout the year and are often a car wreck or unexpected hospital bill away from hard times. [62% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck](#) -- an issue that impacts both low-wage and high-income families.

There is a solution – HB1153/SB740

- Eliminating the reduced price category would allow upwards of **32,393 children** (number of children who received reduced price lunch in 2022-2023) to have access to free school meals.
- **Fiscally responsible:** HB1153/SB740 has a fiscal note of only \$2.2 million to serve tens of thousands of children across the state.

What impact would this have?

- Reducing child hunger means more kids can pay attention and succeed in class. [Studies have shown](#) participation in school meals improves attendance, behavior, and academic achievement.
- School meals are a critical response to childhood hunger. [Data shows](#) that children who eat breakfast and lunch at school rely on school meals for half of their daily energy intake.
- School meals support kids at school and families at home. [Data shows](#) that families whose kids get free breakfast and lunch at school have lower monthly food costs (by spending less at the grocery store).
- **Investing in school meals is an investment in our future workforce.**