

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 27, 2026

Secretary Brooke Rollins
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Acting Administrator Shiela Corley
USDA Food and Nutrition Administration
Braddock Metro Center II
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Secretary Rollins and Acting Administrator Corley:

I am writing regarding the severe impact that cuts under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) are having on children's access to school meals as students across Illinois and the country return to the classroom. I strongly urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) to take immediate action to protect children's access to nutritious school meals, particularly in Illinois communities already experiencing losses in free meal eligibility as a result of the law's cuts to SNAP.

In July 2025, Congress and the Trump Administration enacted the OBBBA, imposing new eligibility and work requirements on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) while making the largest cuts to SNAP in the program's history. Since the law took effect, an estimated 4.5 million people, including 1.5 million children, have lost SNAP benefits nationwide.¹ These losses have serious consequences beyond food assistance, particularly for the more than one million Illinois students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals across nearly 5,000 schools statewide.²

Illinois has been especially hard hit by these changes to SNAP. More than 300,000 Illinoisans are expected to lose benefits due to SNAP's new work and paperwork requirements alone, and the state has already seen a 16 percent drop in SNAP enrollment in the year since the law's enactment.³ These losses do not stop at the grocery store. They follow children into the classroom, where SNAP participation is directly connected to access to free school meals.

At the same time, the OBBBA is shifting a greater share of SNAP's administrative costs onto state governments, increasing the state share from 50 percent to 75 percent beginning this October. For Illinois, that shift is estimated to impose \$935.1 million in new costs, the largest burden of any state in the nation.⁴ At a time

¹"Millions of U.S. Children Could Lose Free School Meals This Fall Due to SNAP Changes, Experts Say," CBS News, August 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/free-school-meals-snap-changes/>.

²Illinois State Board of Education, "Nutrition Data & Analytics," <https://www.isbe.net/pages/nutrition-data-analytics-maps.aspx>; Peter Medlin, "New Report Highlights How SNAP Cuts Could Affect Access to Free School Meals in Illinois," Northern Public Radio (WNIJ), July 15, 2026, <https://www.northernpublicradio.org/wnij-news/2026-07-15/new-report-highlights-how-snap-cuts-could-affect-access-to-free-school-meals-in-illinois>.

³"Federal Cuts Are Hitting Illinois Food Assistance Recipients — and the Farmers Who Feed Them," Capitol News Illinois, June 21, 2026, <https://capitolnewsillinois.com/news/federal-cuts-are-hitting-illinois-food-assistance-recipients-and-the-farmers-who-feed-them/>; "Illinois Sees 16% Drop in SNAP Enrollment One Year After Food Program Overhaul," Chicago Sun-Times, July 27, 2026, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/2026/07/27/illinois-sees-16-drop-in-snap-enrollment-one-year-after-food-program-overhaul>.

⁴Food Research & Action Center, "Shifting the Burden: How the Recently Passed Budget Reconciliation Package Reshapes SNAP and Strains State Budgets," July 30, 2025, <https://frac.org/blog/shifting-the-burden-how-the-recently-passed-budget-reconciliation->

when schools are preparing to serve children every school day, Illinois is being asked to absorb enormous new costs while simultaneously facing a growing threat to the programs that help ensure children have food on the table.

These effects extend directly to school meal eligibility. Because students enrolled in SNAP are automatically “directly certified” for free school meals without having to submit a separate household application, the loss of SNAP benefits can strip children of this automatic eligibility even when nothing about their family’s underlying need for food assistance has changed.⁵ The consequences can extend beyond individual children to entire schools. Schools and districts where at least 25 percent of students are directly certified through SNAP, Medicaid, or other qualifying programs are eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows them to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting individual household applications.⁶ As families lose SNAP because of new paperwork requirements rather than changes in household income, schools can fall below this threshold and lose CEP eligibility entirely, putting free meals at risk for every student who relies on them.⁷ A paperwork failure by one household should not become a food insecurity problem for hundreds of children. If enough families lose direct certification, an entire school can lose access to CEP and its ability to provide free meals to every student.

Nowhere are these consequences more clearly illustrated than in Illinois. According to new data from the Food Research & Action Center, Illinois was one of only three states to experience the largest declines nationwide in the number of schools participating in CEP this school year, with 47 fewer schools and 15 fewer school districts participating compared to the year before, and nearly 24,000 fewer Illinois students attending CEP schools.⁸ These numbers should be an urgent warning to the Administration. At a time when families are already confronting new barriers to food assistance, tens of thousands fewer Illinois students are attending schools that provide free meals to all students through CEP. These are not abstract numbers; they represent children whose access to school meals could become less reliable as the programs designed to reach them come under increasing strain. For districts operating on tight margins, the loss of CEP eligibility could jeopardize their ability to provide free breakfast and lunch to every student. With these declines already occurring as students return to the classroom, federal action cannot wait.

The scale of these impacts raises serious questions about FNA’s readiness to protect children’s access to school meals as the OBBBA’s SNAP changes take full effect. The warning signs are already clear, and the school year is already underway. USDA and FNA should not wait until children lose access to meals or schools lose the ability to participate in CEP before confronting the consequences of these changes.

Accordingly, I request that USDA and FNA conduct an immediate, state-by-state assessment of the impact of the OBBBA’s SNAP eligibility changes on children’s access to school meals and provide responses to the following questions:

[package-reshapes-snap-and-strains-state-budgets.](#)

⁵U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, “Study of Direct Certification,”

<https://www.fna.usda.gov/research/nslp/study-direct-certification>.

⁶U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, “Community Eligibility Provision,” <https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/cep>.

⁷U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, “Study of Direct Certification,”

<https://www.fna.usda.gov/research/nslp/study-direct-certification>.

⁸Erin Kennedy Hysom, “Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools, School Year 2025–2026,” Food Research & Action Center, July 2026, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/CEP-Report-2026.pdf>.

1. How many children have lost direct certification for free school meals as a result of losing SNAP benefits since the OBBBA took effect, both nationwide and in each state?
2. How many schools and school districts have lost, or are at risk of losing, CEP eligibility as a result of changes in SNAP participation, and how many students attend those schools?
3. What steps are USDA and FNA taking to prevent children who lose direct certification from losing access to free school meals and to help schools preserve CEP eligibility?
4. Which states and communities face the greatest risk of reduced access to school meals as a result of these changes, and what assistance are USDA and FNA providing to them?

Please provide responses to these questions, along with the results of the requested state-by-state assessment, to my office no later than September 10, 2026. I also request that USDA make the assessment public so that states, school districts, and families can understand the effects of these changes and the steps being taken to address them.

No child should lose access to breakfast or lunch at school because a parent was unable to satisfy a new bureaucratic requirement for food assistance, and no school should be forced to jeopardize its meal program because federal policy has made it harder to identify children who qualify for assistance. USDA and FNA have a responsibility to confront these consequences before more children lose access to the meals they depend on.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress