

# S.1678-A (Hinchey)/A.1941 (González-Rojas)

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<b>BILL</b> <b>S.1678-A (Hinchey)/A.1941 (González-Rojas)</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b> <b>Providing Universal School Meals to Students</b>
<b>DATE</b> <b>March 31, 2023</b>
<b>SUPPORT</b>

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The Business Council supports S.1678-A (Hinchey)/A.1941 (González-Rojas) related to providing universal school meals to students. For our students to do their best, we need to help them be their best. We cannot expect our students to excel in their classrooms, in extracurricular activities or pathways programs if they are hungry.

The traditional application for free and reduced priced school meals isn't one that is error free. These traditional applications cause students to fall through in approval for free and reduced lunch for many barriers including but are not limited to enrollment changes, language barriers and lack of understanding due to income verification being linked to the application.<sup>i</sup>

School lunch and breakfast programs are seen as an opportunity for some students to have their only complete and most nutritional meals yet financial burdens keep families from being able to participate including the fear of these programs increasing their financial instability. Students from food-insecure households are more likely to participate in school meal programs at 79 percent in comparison to students from food-secure households at 49 percent. Like many other factors affecting families, the pandemic increased the amount of food-insecure households from 10.5 percent to 14.8 percent.<sup>ii</sup>

The financial strain that some families feel as a result of school lunch debt would be relieved with universal meals. Many other states including California, Maine, Colorado, and more have already begun to offer universal meals or have implemented legislation to move in this direction. NYS needs to be a leading state in ensuring our students and children are fed. We must be leaders and not get left behind.

Universal meals relieve a burden on families and on students. For these reasons, The Business Council supports S.1678-A (Hinchey)/A.1941 (González-Rojas).

i [https://nourishca.org/ChildNutrition/ChildNutrition\\_Legislation/SB138-Universal-Free-Meals-Benefits.pdf](https://nourishca.org/ChildNutrition/ChildNutrition_Legislation/SB138-Universal-Free-Meals-Benefits.pdf)

ii <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20220504.114330/>