

119TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. 7542

To amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to make lunches free for all children and to reimburse school meal delinquent debt, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 12, 2026

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and Workforce

A BILL

To amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to make lunches free for all children and to reimburse school meal delinquent debt, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the
5 “Kids Need Lunch Act”.

6 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for
7 this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
- Sec. 2. Effective date.

TITLE I—FREE LUNCHES

- Sec. 101. Apportionment to States.
 Sec. 102. Nutritional and other program requirements.
 Sec. 103. Price for a paid lunch.

TITLE II—ADDRESSING SCHOOL MEAL DEBT

- Sec. 201. Reimbursement of school meal delinquent debt program.
 Sec. 202. No collection of debt.

1 **SEC. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

2 Unless otherwise provided, this Act, and the amend-
 3 ments made by this Act, shall take effect 1 year after the
 4 date of enactment of this Act.

5 **TITLE I—FREE LUNCHES**6 **SEC. 101. APPORTIONMENT TO STATES.**

7 Section 4(b) of the Richard B. Russell National
 8 School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1753(b)) is amended—

9 (1) by striking paragraph (2) and inserting the
 10 following:

11 “(2) PAYMENT AMOUNTS.—

12 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The national average
 13 payment for each free lunch shall be \$4.86, ad-
 14 justed annually for inflation in accordance with
 15 subparagraph (B) and rounded in accordance
 16 with subparagraph (C).

17 “(B) INFLATION ADJUSTMENT.—

18 “(i) IN GENERAL.—The annual infla-
 19 tion adjustment under subparagraph (A)
 20 shall reflect changes in the cost of oper-
 21 ating the free lunch program under this

1 Act, as indicated by the change in the Con-
2 sumer Price Index for food away from
3 home for all urban consumers.

4 “(ii) BASIS.—Each annual inflation
5 adjustment under subparagraph (A) shall
6 reflect the changes in the Consumer Price
7 Index for food away from home for the
8 most recent 12-month period for which
9 that data is available.

10 “(C) ROUNDING.—On July 1, 2027, and
11 annually thereafter, the national average pay-
12 ment rate for free lunch shall be—

13 “(i) adjusted to the nearest lower-cent
14 increment; and

15 “(ii) based on the unrounded amounts
16 for the preceding 12-month period.”; and

17 (2) by striking paragraph (3).

18 **SEC. 102. NUTRITIONAL AND OTHER PROGRAM REQUIRE-**
19 **MENTS.**

20 (a) **ELIMINATION OF FREE LUNCH ELIGIBILITY RE-**
21 **QUIREMENTS.—**

22 (1) **IN GENERAL.—**Section 9(b) of the Richard
23 B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C.
24 1758(b)) is amended to read as follows:

1 “(b) FREE LUNCHES.—All children enrolled in a
2 school that participates in the school lunch program under
3 this Act shall be eligible to receive free lunch under this
4 Act.”.

5 (2) PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO FREE AND RE-
6 DUCED PRICE BREAKFASTS.—In the case of free or
7 reduced price school breakfasts under the Child Nu-
8 trition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1771), subsection (b)
9 of section 9 of the Richard B. Russell National
10 School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758), as in effect on
11 the day before the date of the enactment of this Act,
12 shall apply.

13 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

14 (1) Section 9 of the Richard B. Russell Na-
15 tional School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758) is amend-
16 ed—

17 (A) in subsection (c), in the third sentence,
18 by striking “or at a reduced cost”; and

19 (B) in subsection (e), by striking “, re-
20 duced price,”.

21 (2) Paragraph (2) of section 11(a) of the Rich-
22 ard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42
23 U.S.C. 1759a(a)) is repealed.

1 (3) Clauses (i) and (ii) of section 11(a)(3)(A) of
2 the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act
3 (42 U.S.C. 1759a(a)(3)(A)) are repealed.

4 (4) Section 28 of the Richard B. Russell Na-
5 tional School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1769i) is
6 amended—

7 (A) by striking subsection (b); and

8 (B) by redesignating subsection (c) as sub-
9 section (b).

10 **SEC. 103. PRICE FOR A PAID LUNCH.**

11 Section 12 of the Richard B. Russell National School
12 Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1760) is amended—

13 (1) in subsection (l)(4)—

14 (A) by striking subparagraph (D); and

15 (B) by redesignating subparagraphs (E)
16 through (M) as subparagraphs (D) through
17 (L), respectively;

18 (2) by striking subsection (p); and

19 (3) by redesignating subsections (q) and (r) as
20 subsections (p) and (q), respectively.

21 **TITLE II—ADDRESSING SCHOOL**
22 **MEAL DEBT**

23 **SEC. 201. REIMBURSEMENT OF SCHOOL MEAL DELIN-**
24 **QUENT DEBT PROGRAM.**

25 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) DELINQUENT DEBT.—The term “delinquent
2 debt” means the debt owed by a parent or guardian
3 of a child to a school—

4 (A) as of the effective date specified in sec-
5 tion 2; and

6 (B) for meals served by the school under
7 the school lunch program established under the
8 Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act
9 (42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.).

10 (2) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means
11 the program established under subsection (b)(1).

12 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
13 the Secretary of Agriculture.

14 (b) REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM.—

15 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 60 days
16 after the effective date specified in section 2, the
17 Secretary shall establish a program under which the
18 Secretary shall reimburse each school participating
19 in the school lunch program established under the
20 Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42
21 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.) for all delinquent debt.

22 (2) FORM FOR REIMBURSEMENT.—To carry out
23 the program, the Secretary shall design and dis-
24 tribute a form to State agencies to collect data on

1 all delinquent debt in applicable schools in the State,
2 grouped by school food authority.

3 (3) COMPLETION DATE.—The Secretary shall
4 provide all reimbursements under the program not
5 later than 180 days after the effective date specified
6 in section 2.

7 (c) REPORT.—Not later than 2 years after the effec-
8 tive date specified in section 2, the Comptroller General
9 of the United States shall submit to Congress and make
10 publicly available a report that describes the successes and
11 challenges of the program.

12 (d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
13 authorized to be appropriated such sums as are necessary
14 to carry out this section.

15 **SEC. 202. NO COLLECTION OF DEBT.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other provi-
17 sion of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act
18 (42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.) or any other provision of law,
19 effective beginning on the date of enactment of this Act,
20 as a condition of participation in the school lunch program
21 under that Act, a school—

22 (1) shall not collect any debt owed to the school
23 for unpaid lunch charges; and

24 (2) shall continue to accrue debt for unpaid
25 lunch charges—

1 (A) for the purpose of receiving reimburse-
2 ment under section 201; and

3 (B) until the effective date specified in sec-
4 tion 2.

5 (b) NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH ACT AMENDMENT.—

6 Section 9 of the Richard B. Russell National School
7 Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758) is amended by striking sub-
8 section (d) and inserting the following:

9 “(d) NO COLLECTION OF DEBT.—A school partici-
10 pating in the school lunch program under this Act shall
11 not collect any debt owed to the school for unpaid lunch
12 charges.”.

○