

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4599

To amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to establish a pilot program promoting scratch cooking in school meal programs, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 20, 2026

Mr. SCHIFF introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To amend the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to establish a pilot program promoting scratch cooking in school meal programs, 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.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Scratch Cooked Meals
5 for Students Act of 2026”.

1 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM FOR GRANTS PROMOTING**
2 **SCRATCH COOKING IN SCHOOL MEAL PRO-**
3 **GRAMS.**

4 Section 18 of the Richard B. Russell National School
5 Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1769) is amended by inserting be-
6 fore subsection (b) the following:

7 “(a) SCRATCH COOKING PILOT PROGRAM.—

8 “(1) DEFINITION OF SCRATCH COOKING.—In
9 this subsection, the term ‘scratch cooking’ means the
10 preparation of food using ingredients that are un-
11 processed or minimally processed.

12 “(2) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 180
13 days after the date of enactment of the Scratch
14 Cooked Meals for Students Act of 2026, the Sec-
15 retary shall establish a pilot program (referred to in
16 this subsection as the ‘pilot program’) to award com-
17 petitive grants to school food authorities to promote
18 scratch cooking.

19 “(3) GRANT DURATION.—A grant awarded
20 under the pilot program shall be for a period of 2
21 school years.

22 “(4) APPLICATIONS.—

23 “(A) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to re-
24 ceive a grant under the pilot program, a school
25 food authority shall submit to the Secretary an
26 application at such time, in such manner, and

1 containing such information as the Secretary
2 may require.

3 “(B) PRIORITY.—In evaluating applica-
4 tions received under subparagraph (A), the Sec-
5 retary shall give the highest priority to school
6 food authorities that—

7 “(i) serve the greatest proportion of
8 students eligible for free or reduced price
9 lunch under this Act;

10 “(ii) are—

11 “(I) self-operated; or

12 “(II) provide an assurance to the
13 Secretary that the school food author-
14 ity will be self-operated on or before
15 the date that is 1 year before the last
16 day of the grant period; and

17 “(iii)(I) have employees who are rep-
18 resented by a collective bargaining agree-
19 ment or memorandum of understanding, if
20 such employees are permitted by law to be
21 so represented; or

22 “(II) provide an assurance to the Sec-
23 retary that the school food authority will,
24 with respect to the employees of the school
25 food authority, negotiate a collective bar-

1 gaining agreement or memorandum of un-
2 derstanding on or before the date that is
3 1 year before the last day of the grant pe-
4 riod.

5 “(5) ELIGIBLE USES.—Eligible uses of a grant
6 awarded under the pilot program include—

7 “(A) promoting professional development
8 and training related to preparing, procuring,
9 advertising, serving, and creating menus of
10 meals made with scratch cooking;

11 “(B) purchasing cafeteria equipment or
12 making infrastructure modifications necessary
13 for scratch cooking;

14 “(C) compensating employees for addi-
15 tional food preparation necessary for scratch
16 cooking;

17 “(D) providing technical assistance, pupil
18 engagement, and education related to scratch
19 cooking, such as taste tests, recipe development,
20 and culinary education;

21 “(E) investing in software and technology
22 systems for procurement to support scratch
23 cooking; and

24 “(F) carrying out any additional activities
25 to promote scratch cooking that will help school

1 food authorities meet or exceed the nutrition
2 standards for the school lunch program under
3 this Act and the school breakfast program es-
4 tablished by section 4 of the Child Nutrition
5 Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1773).

6 “(6) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

7 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall
8 enter into an agreement with 1 or more non-
9 profit organizations to establish a technical as-
10 sistance and resource center to provide tech-
11 nical assistance to carry out subparagraphs (A)
12 through (C) of paragraph (5).

13 “(B) COLLABORATION REQUIREMENT.—As
14 soon as practicable after receiving a grant
15 under the pilot program, a school food author-
16 ity shall collaborate with the technical assist-
17 ance and resource center established under sub-
18 paragraph (A)—

19 “(i) to conduct a needs assessment to
20 evaluate equipment needs, equipment utili-
21 zation, procurement processes, and work-
22 force capabilities of the school food author-
23 ity; and

1 “(ii) based on that needs assessment,
2 to establish a strategic plan to carry out
3 the grant.

4 “(7) REPORT FROM SCHOOL FOOD AUTHORI-
5 TIES.—

6 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Each school food au-
7 thority that receives a grant under the pilot
8 program shall, not later than 180 days after the
9 conclusion of the grant period, submit to the
10 Secretary a report on the activities carried out
11 using the grant, including a comparison of the
12 factors described in subparagraph (B) as of the
13 school year immediately preceding the begin-
14 ning of the grant period and the school year at
15 the end of the grant period.

16 “(B) FACTORS DESCRIBED.—The factors
17 referred to in subparagraph (A) are—

18 “(i) the percentage of whole ingredi-
19 ents, raw ingredients, or both, as a share
20 of total expenditures used in school meals;
21 and

22 “(ii) the percentage of menu items
23 prepared with scratch cooking.

24 “(8) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

1 “(A) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to
2 be appropriated to carry out the pilot program
3 \$20,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2027
4 through 2031.

5 “(B) RESERVATIONS.—Of the amounts
6 made available under subparagraph (A), the
7 Secretary shall use—

8 “(i) not more than 15 percent to
9 carry out paragraph (6), including admin-
10 istrative expenses; and

11 “(ii) not more than 5 percent for
12 other administrative expenses.”.

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