

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Combat Food Insecurity Among New Jersey Students

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**SOUTH AMBOY** – Governor Phil Murphy signed two bills today that will help combat food insecurity among students across the state. The first bill, A2368/S1677, which was sponsored by Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, requires New Jersey schools to provide free breakfasts and lunches to students from working-class and middle-income families. The second bill, A2365/S1928, requires school food authorities to engage in public education campaigns and develop promotional materials to educate parents about existing and expanding school meals program options. Together, the laws will help ensure equitable access to resources that simultaneously benefit children's nutrition and support work families' financial stability.

"Consistent access to healthy meals is a fundamental human right, a fact that became all too clear for New Jersey families as they struggled to make ends meet amid a global pandemic," said **Governor Murphy**. "We've fought hard alongside our students' parents to provide our children with the tools they need to grow and excel, and today we demonstrate our intent to double those efforts in the battle against food insecurity. Crucially, by launching extensive public awareness campaigns, we will work to ensure that free, nutritious meals are not only available, but easily accessible, for every New Jersey student.

"No student should have to go hungry at school. We know that students perform better on tests and retain more information when they receive the nutrition they need, and both of these bills will make sure that students in New Jersey are prepared to succeed in school," said **U.S. Representative Frank Pallone, Jr.** "I applaud Governor Murphy, Assembly Speaker Coughlin and the New Jersey Legislature for their leadership on this issue and their support for our schools, teachers, and students in New Jersey.

"The Act is critical to meeting the needs of many working families and puts us on a direct path to feeding breakfast and lunch to every child who needs it," said **Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin**. "Millions of New Jersey residents experienced unemployment during the pandemic meaning more faced food insecurity as a result, many are still struggling to keep up with their bills. Helping keep money in people's pockets, while ensuring more New Jersey students and their families can rely on access to the free school meals they need for success, has never been more important."

"Food insecurity for New Jersey's families is an issue that has become that much more evident since the pandemic," said **Senator Teresa Ruiz**. "For many children throughout New Jersey, the meals they receive in school are their only source of food each day. That is why universal free lunch at school is a goal our state should strive to make a reality and today we take a step closer in order to help all struggling families which is not specific exclusively to low income ones. By expanding the free lunch program to more children, we help more New Jersey families foster a healthy academic experience for all of our students."

"As we work to expand the assistance available to families struggling with food insecurity, many programs continue to be underutilized," said **Senator Vin Gopal**. "This legislation will help to increase enrollment in the free school meals program, ensuring we are reaching as many eligible students as possible. No child should be expected to learn on an empty stomach."

"Given the sharp increase in the cost of living, food insecurity is a major concern for many families around the state. Data has long shown a correlation between having access to nutritious meals and the ability of schoolchildren to learn and maintain good health," said **Senator Joe Vitale, Chair of the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee**. "This initiative will help alleviate some of the economic burden and insecurity for working families across New Jersey so they know they can afford to put meals on the table for their family members."

"Ensuring children have access to proper nutrition is critical not only to their overall health but also their academic success," said **Assemblywoman Pamela R. Lampitt**. "As many working families continue to feel the financial toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be difficult at times to put food on the table. By expanding eligibility for free breakfast and lunch programs, we will provide families with the support they need in times of financial uncertainty and helps to ensure that no student is forced to go hungry."

"Ensuring they have a healthy start in the morning and are nourished throughout the school day sets our children up for academic success," said **Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey**. "By expanding the requirements for these free school meal programs, we can reach more children around the state and assist more families in their time of need."

"We have done great work to ensure that students throughout the state have school meal options. Along with the work that's been done to create these meal options, it is also very important to make sure that families are aware of the existing and expanding meal programs they can choose from. Giving families choices will help us to guarantee children are accessing healthy meals options during the school year," said **Assemblyman Danielsen, Assemblyman Giblin, and Assemblywoman Jaffer**.

"As a former teacher, I know the importance of having well-nourished students in class that have the energy to learn. Too often students fall behind because they are too tired to participate," said **South Amboy Mayor Fred Henry**. "With these two bills, the Governor and the state legislature continue to show that they are working for all of the citizens of New Jersey. On behalf of South Amboy and our school district, I want to thank Governor Murphy, Speaker Coughlin and the combined state legislature for passing these bills and giving our students a better chance for a better education, for our students are our future."

"Today's signing of Bills A2368 and A2365 places into motion the ability for schools to nourish the minds and bodies of scholars from middle-income families. South Amboy Public Schools is dedicated to our vision of ensuring that equity exists for all scholars regardless of any factor that may otherwise deem access to quality education and other daily needs beyond their reach. Providing access to healthy and affordable food enables scholars to be fueled and ready to learn. For the past few months, our Board of Education President, Patrick Walsh, and I have been discussing ways to infuse Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into the fabric of our district and have referenced his graduate research that, in part, reveals that social factors such as a student's race and socio-economic status directly impacts student health outcomes. Not only does the bills signed, today, by Governor Murphy support these discussions but it puts into action across the state of New Jersey our district's vision and goal of equitably

expanding access to all resources for all scholars inclusive of critical food safety net programs. The work of Speaker Coughlin, Governor Murphy and other legislators have leveled the playing field for all scholars and have provided schools with a means to nourish the whole child," said South Amboy Superintendent of Schools Dr. Frederick D. Williams.

## Governor Phil Murphy

## Statewide

[Home \(/governor/\)](/governor/)

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[Governor Phil Murphy \(/governor/admin/about/\)](/governor/admin/about/)

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[Boards, Commissions & Authorities \(/governor/admin/bca/\)](/governor/news/news/562020/governor-contacts.html)

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### Key Initiatives

[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](/governor/initiatives/#Economy)

[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](/governor/initiatives/#Education)

[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](/governor/initiatives/#Environment)

[Health \(/governor/initiatives/#Health\)](/governor/initiatives/#Health)

[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Law and Justice\)](/governor/initiatives/#Law%20and%20Justice)

[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

[Press Releases \(/governor/news/news/562020/governor-contacts.html\)](/governor/news/news/562020/governor-contacts.html)

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[Public Addresses \(/governor/news/addresses\)](/governor/news/addresses)

[Executive Orders \(/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo\\_archive.html\)](/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

[Administrative Orders \(/governor/news/ao/approved/ao\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

[Direct Appointments \(/governor/news/appointments\)](/governor/news/appointments)

[Advice and Consent \(/governor/news/acappointments\)](/governor/news/acappointments)

[Appointments \(/governor/news/statements/approved/statements\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

[Statements on Legislation \(/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)

[Administration Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/press\)](/governor/news/press)

[Press Kits \(/governor/news/press\)](/governor/news/press)

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