

Governor Phil Murphy

# Governor Murphy Signs Hunger Free Students' Bill of Rights Act

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**TRENTON** – Governor Phil Murphy today signed A1104, also known as the Hunger Free Students' Bill of Rights Act. The bill seeks to prevent school districts from taking adverse action, such as denial of meals or public identification measures, known as “lunch shaming,” against students who have school meal bills that are in arrears.

The bill also requires districts to annually provide all parents and/or guardians with the information and forms necessary to maximize participation in programs. Additionally, the bill requires a district's liaison for homeless students to ensure that homeless students receive free meals.

“We have an obligation to ensure that our schools are safe, nurturing environments for our students and maximize the reach of beneficial programs” **said Governor Murphy**. “No child deserves to be shamed over school lunch debt. I commend the Legislature for taking decisive action to protect New Jersey's students from the stigma and punishment of lunch shaming.”

“This bill tackles two very important parts of our school meal issue here in New Jersey,” **said Assemblywoman Carol Murphy**. “First, by eliminating policies employed in schools to punish and effectively stigmatize students whose families cannot pay off school meal debt. And second, by establishing guidelines for schools to improve the identification and participation of eligible students in free and reduced-price meal programs.”

“I find it totally unacceptable that children, whose families may be struggling to pay for any number of reasons, are being singled out,” **said Assemblywoman Angela McKnight**. “Taking a meal away from a child, forcing them to sit at a particular table or stand at the back of the lunch line, withholding grades and barring them from school trips or even prom hinders productive learning. It's bullying and in no way appropriate.”

“We need to be getting a better picture of why families can't pay and then developing action around that, not making assumptions,” **said Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttie**. “The solution could be as simple as connecting parents with school meal program applications and qualification requirements, but until we ensure school districts are doing that we won't know.”

“For many children around the state, the meals they receive in school may be their only reliable source of food each day,” **said Senator Teresa Ruiz**. “Unfortunately, the cost can be financially straining for families struggling to make ends meet and we have seen one too many instances in our state of students being shamed for their school lunch debt. Last year, through legislation I sponsored, we were able to eliminate the cost associated with reduced price meals. As we continue to address food insecurity and school nutrition, the Hunger-Free Students Bill of Rights Act will ensure no one is ostracized for their inability to pay for a meal.”

“In the wake of the current public health crisis, many families across the state will be struggling financially,” **said Senator James Beach**. “Once schools reopen, this law will ensure all districts are handling school lunch debt respectfully and in a manner that does not punish the students.”

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