

Hot Meals for College Students Act of 2026

The ***Hot Meals for College Students Act*** is a targeted step toward ensuring federal nutrition assistance provides students access to nutritious meals on campus. The bill ensures college students can use their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to purchase hot and prepared meals from on-campus vendors, directly addressing food insecurity as a persistent barrier to student success.

Access to nutritious food is especially critical as recent federal policy changes have reduced access to food assistance for millions of Americans. The Trump Administration's 2025 reconciliation bill further tightened SNAP eligibility and work requirements, compounding barriers college students already face in accessing the program. Meanwhile, students are stretching limited budgets across tuition, housing, transportation, and health care, leaving too many without consistent access to meals.

For students, qualifying for SNAP can itself be a significant hurdle. Most students enrolled at least half-time are ineligible unless they satisfy additional exemptions such as working at least 20 hours per week, participating in work-study, or meeting certain caregiving requirements. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that fewer than two in five food-insecure students were potentially eligible for SNAP, and 59 percent of those potentially eligible did not report receiving benefits. Students should be able to focus on their education and their futures, not whether they can afford to sacrifice their next meals.

That is exactly where this bill began. Senator Schiff developed this legislation through his ongoing effort to visit community colleges across California and hear directly from students about the challenges they face. During a visit to San Bernardino Valley College, a student trustee of the community college district raised the difficulty of not being able to use SNAP benefits to purchase meals on campus. By bringing students' experiences into the policymaking process, this bill offers a practical solution to make SNAP more accessible on college campuses and ensure students can more readily use their benefits for nutritious food.

Specifically, the ***Hot Meals for College Students Act***:

- Amends the *Food and Nutrition Act of 2008* to allow eligible college students to use SNAP benefits for meals from participating on-campus vendors.
- Authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to issue implementation guidance and provide technical assistance to state or related agencies and organizations.
- Requires USDA to study students' use of SNAP for on-campus meals and report findings and recommendations to Congress for improving access.