



“Free” School Meals: A Recipe for Government Dependency

Across the nation, state legislatures are expanding [“free” school-meal programs](#), providing breakfast and lunch at taxpayer expense — often regardless of [family income](#). While promoted as a compassionate solution to childhood hunger, these programs expand the unconstitutional welfare state, erode personal responsibility, and undermine parental duty.

States such as [Utah \(S.F. 100\)](#), [Minnesota \(H.F. 5\)](#), [New Mexico \(S.B. 4\)](#), [Vermont \(H. 165\)](#), [Louisiana \(H.B. 282\)](#), [Hawaii \(S.B. 1300 and S.B. 3091\)](#), [Delaware \(H.S. 2-H.B. 125\)](#), [New Hampshire \(H.B. 572\)](#) and [West Virginia \(S.B. 306\)](#) have passed bills to broaden eligibility for government-funded meals or distribute federally subsidized food during school breaks. Many of these measures passed with [overwhelming bipartisan support](#) — some [unanimously](#) — as politicians fear the [political fallout](#) of opposing “feeding children.” These votes are tracked in *The New American’s* [state Legislative Scorecards](#).



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Government-funded Meals: Costly and Unconstitutional

Advocates claim these programs address [“food insecurity,”](#) but the truth is troubling. These [meals are not free](#) — they are funded through compulsory taxation. Bills such as [Utah’s S.F. 100](#) and [Hawaii’s S.B. 1300](#) shift the burden of feeding children from families to taxpayers, forcing working citizens to subsidize others. This is not charity, but an unconstitutional redistribution of wealth.

Worse, many programs are tied to federal initiatives, such as the [Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer \(S-EBT\)](#) program, which impose federal mandates. For instance, Hawaii’s S.B. 3091 authorized an emergency [\\$20 million appropriation](#) to cover shortfalls in school food services due to rising costs. These funds come from taxpayers already burdened by a bloated, [inefficient public-school system](#).

Furthermore, these federal and state programs extend their reach into [private schools](#), potentially imposing government regulations that determine the [allowable food options](#) for school breakfast and lunch. These interventions raise critical questions about the autonomy of private educational institutions and the implications of government oversight on [dietary choices](#). As these programs dictate not only nutritional standards but also the very menus served, they affect the balance between public health initiatives and the [rights of parents](#) to manage their children’s dietary needs and [healthcare](#).



Written by [Ty Bodden](#) on August 11, 2025

The Role of Family, Not the State

The U.S. Constitution and [moral principle](#) assign the duty of feeding children to parents and families — not the government. The [14th Amendment](#) explicitly protects parental rights, recognizing that [parents hold the primary responsibility](#) for the care, nurture, and upbringing of their children. When the state assumes this role, it weakens civil society. Programs authorized by bills such as [New Mexico's S.B. 4](#) and [West Virginia's S.B. 306](#) foster dependency, discourage personal responsibility, and [deepen reliance on government](#), perpetuating poverty.

These programs also violate the [U.S. Constitution. Article I, Section 8](#) grants Congress no authority to fund programs such as the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#), [Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#), or Summer EBT. By [accepting federal funds](#) for these initiatives, state legislatures undermine [state sovereignty](#) and betray their oaths to uphold the Constitution.

SNAP, WIC, and S-EBT

SNAP, originally known as the [Food Stamp Program](#), was [established in 1964](#) as part of Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson's [Great Society](#) agenda aimed at alleviating poverty. Its purpose was to provide low-income families with government-funded assistance to purchase food, marking a significant expansion of [federal welfare](#). The [WIC](#) program was [created in 1972 during Republican President Richard Nixon's presidency](#) to address the nutritional needs of at-risk pregnant women, new mothers, and young children, offering supplemental foods and health education.

More recently, under the Biden administration, the [Summer EBT](#) was established to extend nutritional assistance beyond the school year by providing families with benefits redeemable for food during summer months when free or reduced-price school meals are unavailable. While these programs are promoted as safety nets, they represent an ever-growing federal intrusion into family welfare and economic life, funded by taxpayer dollars, driving up inflation and grocery costs, and often accompanied by burdensome regulations that undermine individual autonomy and state sovereignty.

Covid Expansion

During the Covid-19 pandemic, [government spending on food assistance surged](#) as [Congress temporarily expanded programs](#) such as SNAP and instituted universal free school meals. These measures accelerated a dangerous shift away from private, voluntary charity toward government dependency. Historically, food relief has been most effectively and morally administered through [private charities, churches, and local community organizations funded by voluntary donations](#). These groups, such as local food pantries, offer compassionate, targeted help without coercion or federal overreach. Other nonprofit organizations offer services to address poverty, but most of them [accept federal funds through government grants](#).

Ultimately, [federal welfare schemes redistribute taxpayer dollars](#), dilute local accountability, and inflate food prices through increased demand and regulatory compliance costs. The pandemic-era [expansion](#) of federal food programs should serve as a reminder not of government's benevolence, but of how easily constitutional boundaries are ignored in times of crisis — and how civil society must reclaim its rightful role in caring for the needy.



A Globalist Agenda in Disguise

Some bills, such as [West Virginia's S.B. 306](#), explicitly cite “food insecurity” as a justification for expanding government-run meal programs — a term steeped in [globalist language promoted by the United Nations](#). This rhetoric is not benign. It originates from the [UN's Agenda 2030](#), which includes “Zero Hunger” as one of its [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#). Behind the emotional appeal lies a dangerous premise: that food is a “right” to be guaranteed by the state. This notion is [rooted in socialist ideology](#) and assumes that [governments](#) — not individuals, families, or communities — are ultimately responsible for meeting the basic needs of the population.

By adopting such language and aligning policy with these international objectives, state legislators — whether knowingly or not — are helping to entrench [collectivist](#) principles into state law. In doing so, they undermine American sovereignty, the constitutional separation of powers, and the foundational [belief in limited government](#). Far from merely addressing hunger, these programs serve as vehicles for expanding state control, weakening family responsibility, and importing foreign ideologies into U.S. policy under the guise of humanitarian concern. [Legislators must work to stop the globalist agendas.](#)

Why Lawmakers Vote “Yes”

Opposing “feeding children” is often viewed as politically risky. Legislators fear attack ads accusing them of heartlessness, especially when more and more voters are voting based on “feelings” rather than constitutional policy. Many Republican lawmakers, eager to appear [compassionate](#) and caring to voters, seize on these bills as easy ways to bolster their image, even though the programs are fiscally reckless and morally corrosive. As a result, they often take the easy route, approving welfare expansions that undermine personal responsibility and deepen government dependency.

Free-market Reform Needed

State legislatures seeking to address child hunger without expanding the welfare state can pursue policies that empower families rather than foster dependency. Measures such as eliminating burdensome [regulations](#) on food banks and charities, [cutting taxes](#) across the board so taxpayers have more money in their pockets, supporting [Christian-based and private-school-based programs](#) that encourage parental involvement and do not accept government funds, and reducing [excessive licensing requirements](#) for small food vendors and farmers markets can increase affordable food options in our communities. As of 2025, there are around a dozen states that have [sales tax on groceries](#). By fostering a culture of private charity, local initiative, and family responsibility, lawmakers can help alleviate child hunger while preserving individual liberty and limiting government overreach.

While state legislatures continue expanding welfare programs to “fight hunger,” many ignore — or outright oppose — free-market, pro-family reforms that would offer genuine relief. For example, in [Utah](#), lawmakers passed a bill to [eliminate the state's grocery tax](#), a move that would have eased the burden on working families already struggling with inflation and rising food costs. Yet the measure failed at the [ballot box](#) after [education leaders opposed it](#), claiming it would harm [government-school funding](#). This reveals deeper problems: Rather than reducing government burdens that drive up living costs, many legislators, citizens, and bureaucrats prioritize revenue streams that sustain the very bureaucracies responsible for our current economic strain. With [millions of Americans](#) facing food insecurity, states should focus on reducing tax burdens and eliminating regulations that hinder food access — measures that respect individual liberty and empower civil society, rather than expand



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unconstitutional federal welfare schemes.

Solutions for a Free Society

Taxpayer-funded school-meal programs erode limited government, personal responsibility, and constitutional principles. Feeding children is a [parental duty](#), not a state obligation. Lawmakers must reject these programs and promote family autonomy and fiscal responsibility. Citizens can support this effort by joining organizations such as [The John Birch Society](#), which advocates restoring constitutional governance and empowering families, and by [contacting](#) their state legislators. America's future depends on strong households — not government handouts.

The New American and The John Birch Society, steadfast advocates of constitutional government, urge state legislatures to reject “free” school-meal programs and eliminate funding for existing programs. These programs are an unconstitutional usurpation of family responsibility, an improper function of civil government, and a dangerous entrenchment of the [welfare](#) state. Rather than expand federal or state involvement in food distribution, lawmakers should work to eliminate taxpayer funding for existing programs and restore the rightful roles of parents, churches, and local charitable organizations.

Upholding the Constitution requires courage to resist emotionally charged policies that erode liberty under the guise of compassion. Feeding children is not a legitimate function of government; it is a moral duty that belongs to families and communities — not the state. Legislators who truly care about the long-term welfare of children and the integrity of our Republic must stand firm in defense of limited government, individual responsibility, and the rule of law.

To learn more about how your state and federal legislators vote on issues of constitutional importance, visit The New American's [Freedom Index](#) and state [Legislative Scorecards](#). You can also stay informed about what is happening in your state legislature and in Congress by signing up for legislative alerts [here](#).



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