



## Legislation Summary:

### An Act relative to Universal School Meals

Bill numbers: H603/S261

Chief Sponsors: Representative Andres Vargas and Senator Sal Di Domenico

### What the bill does, why LWVMA supports or opposes it, and the League position relative to this bill.

This bill will:

- Require all schools to make available school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge to the student or their family.
- Require the cost of providing school meals, that is not covered by the federal government, be covered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- Maximize federal reimbursements for meals by encouraging schools to support Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach to families. Students in households enrolled in SNAP receive free school meals reimbursed by the federal government.

School meals are a critical source of nutrition for many children, helping them learn and be active in the short term, and thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in the long term. School meals also establish lifelong healthy eating habits that can reduce the cases and severity of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, along with the cost associated with these diseases.

School meals can account for over half of a child's daily calories. These are children who might not otherwise have reliable access to healthy food at home. But right now, more than half of students who could benefit from school meals aren't eating them. While there are many reasons for this, two of the biggest barriers that stop children from participating in school meals are the cost of purchasing meals and the stigma of being singled out as needing a school meal.

Massachusetts extended pandemic measures providing school breakfast and lunch at no cost to students in the 2022-2023 school year.

League Positions

Meeting Basic Human Needs: Persons who are unable to work, whose earnings are inadequate, or for whom jobs are not available have a right to an income and/or services sufficient to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and access to health care (Impact on Issues, p.135)