



**WASHINGTON WATCH
FEDERAL NEWS
FOR NEW YORK'S RURAL SCHOOLS**

Dear Rural School Leaders,

I'm sure you're as inundated with virus stories as you can tolerate, but this is a report on new federal legislation easing student meal regulations and instituting leave provisions for school employees.

Stay strong!

Trump Signs Coronavirus Bill With Provisions on Paid Leave, Student Meals

By [Andrew Ujifusa](#) on March 18, 2020 9:18 PM



UPDATED

President Donald Trump has signed emergency coronavirus legislation that eases rules for meals schools provide to students, and provides certain leave benefits related to schools.

[The Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) passed the Senate by a vote of 90-8 on Wednesday [after passing the House](#) last weekend. The legislation incorporates three House pieces of legislation designed to make it easier for students to access food, including those typically served by schools. Trump signed the bill the same day the Senate passed it. Here's what we wrote about the student-meal section of the bill several days ago:

- One, the [Maintaining Essential Access to Lunch for Students Act \(MEALS\) Act](#), would waive a requirement that prevents the U.S. Department of Agriculture from granting waivers to states from the federal school lunch law if those waivers would increase costs to the federal government; the legislation was introduced by Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn.
- Another, the [COVID-19 Child Nutrition Response Act](#), would allow school officials to serve meals in a variety of settings through a new nationwide waiver authority, and was introduced by Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore., and Rep. James Comer, R-Ky.
- Separately, the [Pandemic EBT Act](#) would allow states to grant Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits to students whose schools close for at least five days due to the coronavirus, and who would otherwise receive subsidized school meals. This bill was authored by Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., and Rep. Marcia Fudge, D-Ohio.

The legislation provides certain job protections related to school closures and government employees, including teachers.

- For government employees (including public school teachers) and those who work for organizations with 50 or more employees, they would be entitled to an initial 10 days of unpaid sick leave if they are impacted by the coronavirus. This would be followed by paid leave equal to at least two-thirds of their normal pay. There are caps on the paid leave of \$200 per day and \$10,000 in the aggregate. These provisions are temporary changes to the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993.
- In addition, if an employee is caring for a child at home because his or her school or child-care provider is closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, or because they are under quarantine or directly impacted by the coronavirus in other ways, full-time employees are entitled to 80 hours of emergency paid sick leave. For part-time employees, the time would be equal to the average number of hours they work over a two-week period. This emergency paid sick leave benefit would apply to government employees and those who work at organizations with fewer than 500 employees. There are caps on this benefit of \$511 per day and \$5,110 in the aggregate for full-time employees, and \$200 per day and \$2,000 in the aggregate for part-time employees; however, parents caring for family members whose schools are closed shall receive compensation of two-thirds their regular pay.

Both those sets of provisions would sunset on Dec. 31, 2020. Trump said last week he supports the legislation.

The Families First bill represents the second phase of the federal government's legislative response to the spread of the coronavirus. On March 6, [Trump signed an \\$8.3 billion coronavirus-response package](#) targeted at developing a vaccine, assisting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other health care programs.

The Trump administration has also [proposed a \\$45.8 billion package](#) to assist federal agencies in handling the coronavirus that includes a little over \$100 million for schools, including K-12 and higher education. More broadly, Washington is considering an economic stimulus package that could approach \$1 trillion—Democrats have [proposed a \\$3 billion aid package for K-12 and higher education](#) that could get rolled into this stimulus legislation.