



2016 Position Paper: *Unpaid Meal Charges*

- **Compel USDA to complete its report and implement regulations that effectively address debt arising from unpaid meal charges.**

School nutrition professionals are committed to ensuring students have access to healthy school meals and work diligently to enroll as many eligible students as possible in the free or reduced price meal program.

Unfortunately, many schools have experienced an increase in the number of non-enrolled children who arrive in the cafeteria without money to pay for their school breakfast or lunch. Currently, schools must determine if these students can “charge” their meals or receive an alternate meal, such as a cheese sandwich and milk.

Since school meal programs receive no federal reimbursement for alternate or charged meals, some districts have accumulated substantial unpaid meal debts that can impact the quality of the program for all students.

In 2010 as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (P.L. 111-296), Congress instructed USDA to address the problem of unpaid meal charges. Section 143 required USDA to examine current policies and practices regarding meal charges and alternate meals and report on the feasibility of establishing national standards. The law also instructed USDA to consider testing and implementing the standards.

USDA has failed to report on this issue. Congress should compel USDA to complete this work and implement standards that address unpaid meal debt.