The Maintaining Essential Access to Lunch for Students (MEALS) Act

Description of Program and Relief

The Maintaining Essential Access to Lunch for Students Act (the “MEALS Act”) seeks to ensure students have access to school meal benefits while schools are closed because of COVID-19. Enacted as part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the MEALS Act enables the Secretary of Agriculture to waive eligibility conditions that states are typically required to meet in order to receive financial support for federal nutrition programs, so that schools may continue to provide meals to students while closed due to COVID-19.

Government or Lead Agency

Department of Agriculture

Dates Available

Funds are available through September 30, 2020.

Eligibility Requirements/Restrictions

Congress previously established a program under which states that met certain requirements were eligible for school lunch program assistance from the federal government. Under the original program, the Secretary of Agriculture was empowered to grant waivers that would allow states that did not meet all of the requirements to receive assistance, provided that such waivers would not increase costs to the federal government.

The MEALS Act broadens the Secretary of Agriculture’s power to grant such waivers, eliminating the requirement that such waivers do not increase federal costs. The Act will thus allow states to continue providing free or subsidized meals to students while schools are closed due to COVID-19, without any interruptions to the program.

List of Additional Information