



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 24, 2022

Contact: Ryan Catalani
rcatalani@hawaii-can.org
808-531-5502 ext. 104

Hawai'i is short tens of millions of federal funds annually to support feeding children, says new report

HONOLULU, Hawai'i — Since 2000, Hawai'i has missed out on over \$200 million in federal funding for the state's school meal programs, according to a new report released today.

The report, "[Feed our Keiki. Support our Schools. Help our Farmers.](#)" was published by Hawai'i Appleseed, Hawai'i Children's Action Network, the Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance, and Ulupono Initiative.

Nationwide, school districts receive funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide nutritious meals. "Feed our Keiki" finds that the USDA is providing far less funding to Hawai'i than it should, resulting in a financial crisis for Hawai'i's child nutrition programs.

"Because of this lack of federal funding, Hawai'i's state government has to pay between \$20 and \$30 million annually to keep feeding kids," said Nicole Woo, Director of Research & Economic Policy at Hawai'i Children's Action Network. "Other school districts across the nation pay much less. This means that in Hawai'i, less funding is available to cover other important education costs, like pre-K programs, afterschool programs, and better pay for teachers."

This discrepancy stems from a federal analysis that hasn't been updated since 1979, according to the report. The report calls on the USDA and Congress to pass an emergency appropriation for Hawai'i to make up the difference. On May 20, Hawai'i's Congressional delegation jointly [asked the USDA](#) to cover the "full, accurate cost of school meals" in the state.

Food insecurity is a significant issue in the state. One in three keiki in Hawai'i were projected to be food insecure in 2020, according to [Feeding America](#), and the number of schools and sponsors offering federally reimbursed meals in Hawai'i has been shrinking steadily over the years, exacerbating the issue. In fact, the report finds that Hawai'i consistently ranks at the bottom of all states for participation in federal nutrition programs.

The YMCA of Honolulu is currently Hawai'i's sole provider of after school suppers through the federal program, according to the report. It has to rely on grants and donations to keep the program running even in a limited capacity.



“For too many children, these federally-subsidized meals are the last nutritious meal they will have before the next school or program day,” said Diane Tabangay, Executive Director of Youth Programs at the YMCA of Honolulu. “Parents tell us that knowing their children were fed a complete after school supper helps to keep their grocery expenses down and makes it possible for them to meet other essential needs such as electric bills or gas.”

This lack of federal funding also has implications for our state’s farm to school goals, according to the report, because local farmers and food businesses typically cannot compete with commodity food prices.

“Maximizing available federal funds for student meals is good for our keiki, good for our schools, and good for our local farmers and ranchers,” said Jesse Cooke, vice president of investments and analytics with Ulu pono Initiative. “Leaving federal dollars on the table short-changes our entire community because a portion of those funds would go to Hawaii's food producers, with that percentage growing each year as the DOE makes progress toward its goal of 30% locally sourced meals by 2030.”

The complete report can be found [here](#).

###

Hawai'i Appleseed is working to build a more socially just Hawai'i, where everyone has genuine opportunities to achieve economic security and fulfill their potential. We change systems that perpetuate inequality and injustice through policy development, coalition building and advocacy.

Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and the only one in the state of Hawai'i solely committed to advocating for children. HCAN addresses the root causes of poverty and inequity and develops public policies that help children and their families.

The Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance is a network of individuals and organizations dedicated to supporting and advancing sustainable, quality afterschool, summer learning, and community schools that result in improved academic, social, emotional, and physical outcomes for children and families in Hawai'i.

The Ulu pono Initiative strives to improve the quality of life for the people of Hawai'i by working toward sustainable solutions that support and promote locally produced food, renewable energy, clean transportation, and better management of water and waste.