



# NEWS

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**Service Employees International Union**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NEW JERSEY SCHOOL CAFETERIA WORKERS LOBBY CONGRESS ON SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM**

**Newark, NJ** – Twenty school cafeteria workers from New Jersey will join their co-workers from around the country to call on Members of Congress to strengthen federal child nutrition programs this Wednesday. This is the first time in the 63-year history of our nation's School Lunch Program, which provides food for more than 30 million children, front-line food service workers will be joining together to call for improvements in Washington, DC.

"I love my work, but it's getting harder to prepare nutritious meals on the low budget we're working with," said Leslie Williams, a cafeteria worker at Lincoln Avenue Elementary in Orange. "Sometimes I go into my own pocket when I see a child who's hungry. As I see it, part of my job is to make sure the kids are well-fed."

An estimated 7,000 workers prepare and serve lunch for New Jersey school children, including 416,000 students who rely on free or reduced-priced lunches for a healthy meal. Although they are responsible for the health and nutrition of our school children, they are paid poverty-level wages that leave their own children dependent on free and reduced-price lunch as well as other publicly funded programs. For instance, more than 6,300 school food service workers and their children receive health care through tax-payer funded New Jersey Family Care and Medicaid.

"Low wages and poor training are undermining school cafeteria workers' efforts to provide nutritious and healthy meals to our school children," said Kevin Brown, 32BJ New Jersey Director. "Federal programs designed to alleviate poverty should not be keeping working families in poverty."

On Capitol Hill, the school food service workers, members of 32BJ SEIU and Service Workers United, are calling for stronger USDA Child Nutrition Programs that will:

- Increase the federal reimbursement rates for meals to enable schools to cover the rising costs of meeting dietary guidelines and to purchase fresh, healthy foods;
- Reach more struggling families by relaxing eligibility requirements, streamlining application processes, and allowing for regional variations in cost of living in determining eligibility;
- Improve food safety, nutrition, health and wellness, and customer service by including workplace standards such as paid sick leave, training and a requirement that cafeteria workers be paid good wages and have access to affordable health care.

The USDA's Child Nutrition Programs include the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Summer Food Service Program.

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*With more than 110,000 members, including 1,000 school cafeteria workers in New Jersey, 32BJ is the largest property services union in the country.*