

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 2365

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 19, 2022

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 2365.

As amended, current law requires the Department of Agriculture (DOA), in consultation with the Department of Education (DOE), to develop pamphlets and other promotional materials for the State's school meals programs and provide such promotional materials to every school district in the State, for distribution to the parents and guardians of students who are enrolled at schools in the district. This bill would amend this law to instead require each food service vendor or food service management company that provides a food service to students in the State to: (1) develop and implement a public education campaign that is designed to educate parents and guardians of students at schools served by the vendor or management company about the various school meals program options that are available to students in New Jersey and the availability of free and reduced price meals, thereunder, to students who satisfy federal or State-level eligibility criteria; and (2) develop promotional materials for the State's school meals programs, and provide copies of the promotional materials to each school served by the vendor or management company, for distribution, by school staff, to the parents and guardians of students enrolled at the school. A food service vendor or management company would be required to utilize existing resources, made available by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the DOA, in developing the promotional materials required by the bill.

The bill would require the DOA, in consultation with the DOE, to adopt standards and guidelines to ensure the uniformity and accuracy of school meals-related information that is being presented by a food service vendor or food service management company as part of the educational campaigns conducted, and in the promotional materials distributed, under the bill.

The bill would further specify that a food service vendor or management company's public education campaign and promotional materials are to:

(1) satisfy the standards, and comply with the guidelines established by the DOA, in consultation with the DOE, under the bill;

(2) highlight and promote the nature, purposes, value, and importance of the National School Lunch Program, the federal School Breakfast Program, the federal Summer Food Service Program and other similar summer meals programs, as well as the State's breakfast after the bell programs, the State's emergency meals distribution program (established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic), and any new school meals programs that are implemented in the State after the bill's effective date;

(3) emphasize the importance of providing a nutritious meal to all children for their general health and success in school;

(4) emphasize the ability of eligible students to obtain free or reduced price meals under the State's school meals programs, and inform parents and guardians about the various ways in which a student may be determined to be categorically eligible for free meals under these programs, and the federal and State-level income-based criteria that must be satisfied in order for a student to obtain free or reduced price school meals, under these programs, on the basis of annual household income;

(5) highlight and describe the application and determination processes that are used, by schools and school districts, to certify students for free or reduced price school meals;

(6) highlight and describe the rights that are applicable to students and families in association with a student's subsidized or unsubsidized receipt of school meals in the State; and

(7) inform parents and guardians about the nature and extent of any proposed or implemented expansion of the existing school meals programs in the State, including, but not limited to, the nature and extent of any proposed or implemented expansion of the categories of students who are eligible for free or reduced price school meals under such programs.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to require food service vendors and management companies (not the DOA and DOE, as was provided by existing law and the introduced bill) to engage in the public education campaigns and the development of school meals-related promotional materials, as required by the bill. The amendments further provide for each vendor or management company to provide the promotional materials to each school served thereby, for further distribution, by school staff, to the parents and guardians of students who are enrolled at the school. The amendments would require the vendor or management company to utilize existing resources, made available by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the DOA, in developing the promotional materials.

The amendments would further require the DOA, in consultation with the DOE, to adopt standards and guidelines to ensure the uniformity and accuracy of school meals-related information that is

being presented by food service vendors and management companies as part of the educational campaigns conducted, and in the promotional materials distributed, under the bill. Finally, the amendments would require food service vendors and management companies to comply with these standards and guidelines when implementing the public education campaigns and developing the promotional materials.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) determines that the bill will result in one-time administrative cost increases to the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Education to develop standards and guidelines that ensure the uniformity and accuracy of school meals information being presented by food service vendors and management companies in the public education campaign and promotional materials. The OLS notes that in developing the promotional materials, food service vendors and management companies are to utilize existing resources that have been made available by the State and the US Department of Agriculture.

School districts may potentially incur additional costs from increased administrative duties resulting from the bill, such as distributing the promotional materials to students' parents and guardians. These costs, if any, will be dependent upon the manner in which the school district decides to transmit the information to parents and guardians.