



SB1080 (Newman): Halal and Kosher School Meals



CAIR-CA Position: SUPPORT

Summary

SB 1080 would require school sites to provide culturally appropriate halal or kosher food options if the share of a school’s student body is comprised of five percent or more of individuals adhering to these dietary restrictions. Under its provisions, schools will be authorized and directed to collect information from pupils for the purpose of assessing whether the relevant threshold pertains. If a school site does not meet the threshold requirement but wants to offer these food options to its students, this bill would not prohibit them from doing so.

Background & Problem

In recent years, and especially in response to the needs illuminated by the pandemic, California has made substantial progress in addressing food insecurity and barriers to nutrition in our schools. In 2021, California become the first state in the nation to permanently provide free school meals to all K-12 school students, irrespective of household income. Since being implemented, the Free School Meals for All Act of 2021 has had a profoundly positive impact, above and beyond reducing food insecurity, by reducing the stigma historically associated with participating in school nutritional programs.

While every student can now receive a free school lunch regardless of family income, students who have specific dietary restrictions still find themselves left out of the program. California’s current School Meals for All program does not include provisions for halal or kosher food in meal plans. Consequently, some minority religious communities in California do not have the food options which meet the religious dietary restrictions to which they adhere at the California K-12 schools they attend. Jewish and Muslim students in California should not experience exclusion or stigmatization at school due to the conscientious observance of their closely held religious beliefs.

By failing to provide halal and kosher food options, schools risk making these students feel alienated and less able to fully participate in school activities. The

current lack of accommodation can contribute to feelings of isolation and discrimination, which can ultimately hinder Muslim and Jewish students’ ability to fully engage in the inclusive, well-rounded education of which all California students should be assured.

Solution

By requiring any school site whose share of students exceeds 5% of Muslim or kosher students to offer an appropriate school meal option consistent with their cultural practices, SB 1080 will reduce stigma; promote cultural understanding and appreciation among students; build a more tolerant environment; and break down stereotypes and prejudices.

Additionally, enhanced exposure to diverse perspectives and cultures has been found to encourage critical thinking and broaden students’ understanding of complex issues. SB 1080, which would be the first culturally appropriate school nutrition program of its kind in the country, will also promote engagement and participation between schools and families from religious minority backgrounds by encouraging them to communicate regarding their dietary needs on a proactive, inclusive basis

In light of the recent and alarming increase of Islamophobia, California has an opportunity to take a leadership role nationally once again, this time by further advancing the integration of targeted communities within our public school system. Offering Halal and Kosher meals will allow all students to participate in school meal, allowing every student, regardless of religious persuasion or dietary restrictions, to fully engage in school and feel valued and included in their community.

Support

- Council on American-Islamic Relations, California
- California Association of Food Banks
- Lashon Academy

Opposition

None