

ASSEMBLY HOMELAND SECURITY AND STATE
PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 3840

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 16, 2020

The Assembly Homeland Security and State Preparedness Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 3840.

As reported by the committee, this bill provides direction to school districts for the provision of school meals to students if the districts are directed by either the New Jersey Department of Health or the health officer of the jurisdiction to institute a public health-related closure due to the COVID-19 epidemic. Under these circumstances, the district is required to implement a program during the period of the school closure to provide school meals to all district students who are eligible for the free and reduced price school lunch and school breakfast programs.

Under the program, the school district is required to collaborate with county and municipal government officials to identify one or more school meal distribution sites that are walkable and easily accessible to students in the district. The bill lists possible sites including, but not limited to: faith-based locations; community centers, such as YMCAs; and locations in the school district where summer meals are available. The bill provides, however, that if there is high density housing in a school district, the district must make every effort to identify a school meal distribution site in that housing area.

The bill also requires school districts to identify students for whom a school meal distribution site is not within walking distance. In the case of these students, the school district will distribute the school meals to the student's residence or to the student's bus stop along an established bus route provided that the student or the student's parent or guardian is present at the bus stop for the distribution. Food distributed to the student's residence may include up to a total of three school days' worth of food per delivery.

School districts may use school buses owned and operated by the district to distribute school meals pursuant to the provisions of the bill. In the case of a school district that does not own and operate its own buses, the district is permitted to contract for the distribution of school meals and these contracts will not be subject to the public bidding requirements pursuant to the "Public School Contracts Law," P.L.1977, c.114 (C.18A:18A-1 et seq.).

If a school district is unable to provide school meals pursuant to school meal distribution sites or through distributions at the student's residence, the school district must establish a food voucher system for these students. The food voucher system must be established in accordance with criteria promulgated by the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Human Services. Under the food voucher system funds will be provided to students to enable them to access nutritious food at food retail stores.

Finally, the bill provides that the State will bear any costs not reimbursed by the federal government which school districts incur in effectuating the provisions of this bill. The State is required to maximize the waiver flexibilities being provided by the federal government to address the loss of meals for low-income children due to COVID-19-related school closures.