

April 2, 2025

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for AB 1264 – Phasing Out Particularly Harmful Ultra-Processed Foods from California Schools

Dear Assemblymember Gabriel,

On behalf of the Chef Ann Foundation, I write in support of your bill, AB 1264, which will protect children's health by phasing out "particularly harmful" ultra-processed foods (UPFs) from school meals.

The Chef Ann Foundation is a national non-profit dedicated to promoting whole-ingredient, scratch cooking in schools. Scratch cooking enables schools to serve the healthiest, tastiest meals so that students are well-nourished and ready to learn. To date, the Chef Ann Foundation has reached more than 13,500 schools and 3.3 million students. Our mission is to ensure that school food professionals have the resources, funding, and support they need to provide fresh, healthy, delicious, cooked from scratch meals that support the health of children and our planet. Scratch, whole-ingredient cooking in schools is a vehicle to achieving many different goals on our path forward to healthier communities, including the reduction of ultra-processed foods in schools.

UPFs are not just highly manufactured – they are deliberately engineered to be hyper-palatable. Packed with industrial additives, these products are designed to override the body's natural hunger cues and encourage overconsumption. Unlike whole or minimally processed foods, UPFs offer little nutritional value while contributing to chronic health conditions including cancer, cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes.

California has been leading the nation in school food reform. The state was the first in the nation to pass and implement [School Meals for All](#), ensuring that all students have daily access to free breakfast and lunch in school. Additional state investments include [Kitchen Infrastructure and Training Funds](#), which provided \$750 million to purchase equipment and upgrades to kitchen infrastructure to meet the growing demand for freshly prepared food. California also implemented the [School Food Best Practices Funds](#), which are designed to increase local procurement and freshly prepared meals in schools. Most recently, California became the first state in the nation to ban harmful additives in school food with your bill - the [School Food Safety Act](#) - prohibiting California public schools from serving foods containing six synthetic food dyes that have been linked to developmental and behavioral harm to children. Building on those successes, Governor Gavin Newsom [recently released an executive order](#) directing state agencies to recommend potential actions to limit the harms associated with “ultra-processed foods” and food ingredients that pose a health risk to individuals. The executive order includes directives to (1) identify areas where California may adopt higher standards for healthy school meals than national standards and (2) explore developing new standards and partnerships to further protect and expand universal school food programs.

While California continues to push forward, labor challenges are [consistently identified](#) as a top barrier for districts tasked with implementing the state’s innovative school food reforms. In the 2022/2023 state budget, California invested in the [Healthy School Food Pathway \(HSFP\) program](#), a first-in-the-nation registered apprenticeship program aimed at increasing capacity and skill sets for California school food teams. The Healthy School Food Pathway program is designed to address those barriers, ensuring that the investments in California’s school food programs are utilized to their full potential. The program recruits and trains the school food workforce so that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to use existing and new kitchen equipment, procure local ingredients, and incorporate them into school menus while producing great-tasting meals that kids want to eat.



The Chef Ann Foundation sees a skilled and valued school food workforce as the key to unlocking California's continued progress with school food reform, including the reduction of UPFs. AB 1264 directs the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) to identify those UPFs posing the greatest health risk to school aged children, enlisting California's state scientists to identify which additives and combinations of additives pose the greatest risk to their health. Identification and classification are critical on the path to reducing UPFs in school food, which work in tandem with California's continued investments to provide access, resources, and a skilled workforce on the path toward healthier school food.

AB 1264 will build on that foundation, giving California another opportunity to make children's health a top priority. Thank you for your continued leadership to improve child nutrition and reduce ultra-processed foods in schools. Our students are on the path to a better future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mara Fleishman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mara Fleishman

Chief Executive Officer, Chef Ann Foundation

