



Health Department

February 27, 2019

House Committee on Human Services and Housing
900 Court St. NE - HR 50
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 2639 - Relating to nutrition assistance for low income families

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chairs Noble and Sanchez, and members of the Committee, my name is Kathleen Humphries and I am the Maternal, Child, and Family Health Nutrition Program Manager for Multnomah County Health Department. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on HB 2626.

This bill extends nutrition support benefits to Oregon's low-moderate income children from age five until they go to kindergarten. It benefits WIC eligible families directly, it is well-considered, and deserves to be supported and implemented.

WIC services prepare children for school (kindergarten) through support for healthy nutrition and food habits, auxiliary services such as immunizations and dental health, and help for their parents and caregivers with parenting and transitions. These services benefit poor families, many of whom do not receive similar benefits and support from other sources, like private preschool. Food insecurity rises when families leave WIC, either before their eligibility expires or when the children "graduate" at age five. If the child is in kindergarten, the impact of the reduced healthy food benefits upon WIC graduation are mediated. The child in kindergarten can receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch, which fills the nutrition gap that WIC termination creates.

At this time, a family whose child is on WIC can experience a lack of necessary nutrition support for up to one year before school meal support is available to them. This has been shown to impact the nutrition status and the food security of the entire family.

Public schools will benefit by having well nourished children entering kindergarten. All sectors are who doing work with children in the areas of food and nutrition, school, and health/development will benefit by having their clients' in better health, nutritional status, and be more food secure.

Right now, WIC services stop for a child when that child reaches their fifth birthday. This bill extends eligibility to the time that the child goes to kindergarten, where they will then get free or reduced breakfast and lunch. When eligible families with young children go off of WIC, the food insecurity of the family goes up. Children entering school fills the food gap for families; but it is only effective if there is not a time lag between WIC benefits and school food benefits.

This bill builds upon the existing capacity of the local WIC programs and is therefore a bargain financially. Oregon's WIC programs have the capacity to continue services for the 5-year old children who are not yet in kindergarten.

For these reasons I am in support of the HB2626 and highly recommend "WIC to Kindergarten" for Oregon's children and families.

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