

April 8, 2019

To: Chair Doherty and members of the House Education Committee,

The Rural Organizing Project is a non-profit organization supporting a network of over sixty groups in rural counties and the small towns of Oregon in 31 of Oregon's 36 counties. We are writing in support of The Hunger-Free Schools bills - (Universal Access to School Meals (**HB 2760-1**) and Breakfast After the Bell (**2765-1**). We know from talking with our members who are active in their communities across the state that the needs of children and teenagers are high on their list of concerns. They are aware of food insecurity in many families because they are the folks who volunteer in their local food banks or shelters, are teachers and are the parents who are active in programs in the local schools. And often, they themselves, are part of families who are put at risk when a lay-off, an illness in the family or a plant closure has affected their own income.



We believe that expanding access to school lunches and breakfasts and giving schools more flexibility in the timing of how breakfast is made available, is crucial to meeting the needs of kids living in food insecure households. It ensures that they can progress in their education without hunger and the resulting barriers to learning. In addition, many of the students who are not getting their nutritional needs met at home, also have parents working multiple jobs or long hours. They struggle to get kids off to school while trying to prepare food and find transportation to jobs in rural areas. Knowing that their kids will be fed nutritional meals at school reduces the stress of finding ways to make sure that their children are eating healthy meals when they may have to be doing shift work or leaving for work very early in the mornings because of travel to neighboring towns or farms.

Providing meals in a universal program reduces the stigma that many children and teens feel when they are singled out as "poor" – and we also like that aspect of this proposal. Many of the folks in our member groups are struggling, and those who aren't know others who are. This proposal is one way to help families who are doing their best to provide for their children and make life better for everyone in our state by ensuring that more students get what they need to be successful in school and help their families at the same time.

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