

TO: House Committee on Education
FROM: Matt Newell-Ching, Public Policy Manager
RE: Support for HB 2536 to Strengthen Access to School Meals
DATE: March 16, 2021



Chair Alonso Leon and members of the committee,

Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 11 Oregonians were food insecure. In 2020, 1 in 4 people in our communities faced hunger – a dramatic increase.

The Student Success Act's (SSA) investments in nutrition make Oregon the nation's leader in ensuring access to school meals. The SSA did this in two key ways: (1) making it financially viable for significantly more schools to serve meals to all students at no charge, and (2) expanding income eligibility (up to 300% FPL) at schools that require school meal applications, recognizing that **one in three students in Oregon that experience food insecurity live in a household that is above the federal income cutoff (185% FPL).** 300% FPL matches eligibility in other key programs such as Medicaid and federal emergency food assistance in Oregon.

Oregon Food Bank supported these provisions in 2019, and **we support HB 2536 which makes an important clarification to ensure the letter of the law meets the law's intention.** HB 2536 does this by standardizing income eligibility guidelines so that all students in households that earn up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for meals at no charge. The key difference is that *current statute allows schools to opt out* of this provision, and HB 2536 would standardize this across all eligible schools.

Additional considerations:

- The budget report for HB 5047 (2019) - which funds the SSA - clarified legislative intent that all schools serving school meals would either serve meals to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or participate in expanded income eligibility:

"For non-CEP schools, students in households between 186 and 300 percent of the federal poverty level will become eligible for the free and reduced lunch program."

-Budget Report for HB 5047 (2019)

- Because the funding in the SSA assumed all non-CEP schools would participate in expanded income eligibility up to 300% FPL, we believe a fiscal analysis for HB 2536 will be cost-neutral. **We therefore request that the subsequent referral to the Ways and Means Committee be removed.**

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