

Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the Committee,
For the record, my name is Jessica Dalton. I am the food service director at the Baker School District in Baker City, OR. I am writing to request your support for HB 2836. In Oregon, 1 in 3 kids who experience hunger wouldn't normally qualify for free school meals because of their family income. Yet children who access school meals are shown to attend

more days of school, improve test scores, be more likely to graduate, and earn more as adults. Free school meals during the pandemic has made a huge impact in my community this year. Lawmakers prioritized expanding income eligibility for free school meals in the Student Success Act in 2019, as a step toward creating universal school meals. Yet the interpretation of the current statute puts the burden on schools to "opt in" to implementing expanded income eligibility, rather than this being the default. This creates the potential for some students facing hunger to have unequal access to free school meals, depending on where they live. The legislature already set aside the funding in 2019. The language just needs to be fixed. HB 2536 makes it clear that Oregon will have consistent, expanded eligibility guidelines (up to 300% poverty level) for students at all schools that are serving school meals and collecting income applications.

All of Oregon's students deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential at school, regardless of where they attend. It is simpler, more efficient, and more equitable to expand income eligibility consistently statewide to all schools that fall within the legislated criteria. We urge lawmakers to ensure that all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) - but that do not offer universal school meals through CEP - will automatically become a school with Expanded Income Eligibility for free school meals. Thank you for the consideration and I ask for your support of HB 2536.
Jessica Dalton/Baker School District