



Date: March 16, 2021

Re: Support for HB 2536

Chair Alonso Leon and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Molly Notarianni. I am the Executive Director at Farmers Market Fund in Portland, Oregon. I am writing to request your support for **HB 2536**.

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 inequal 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.

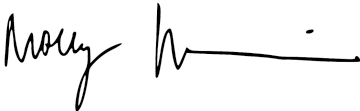
Having equitable access to free school meals is important to me because food insecurity in Oregon is at the highest levels in a century. In addition, long-stranding structural inequities have ensured that the burdens of food insecurity routinely fall more heavily on people of color, immigrants and refugees, single parents and caregivers, and our trans and gender non-conforming neighbors.

At Farmers Market Fund, we coordinate Double Up Food Bucks, a SNAP matching program that provides shoppers a dollar-for-dollar match on their SNAP benefits at 50+ farmers markets across Oregon, so they can bring home twice as many fruits and vegetables. Demand for Double Up Food Bucks surged in 2020, resulting in the largest year in the program's history. Just as families deserve equitable access to fresh, nutritious produce to eat at home, students

deserve equitable access to free school meals. The passage of this bill would help students at an estimated 484 schools, ultimately leading to their success and graduation. In addition, this technical fix has no anticipated fiscal impact and it has broad support from education and anti-hunger stakeholders.

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Molly Notarianni". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Molly Notarianni
Farmers Market Fund
Portland, Oregon