

Date: May 04, 2021

Re: Support for HB 2536

Chair Dembrow, Vice-chair Thomsen and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alex Singer. I am the Nutrition Director at Central School District 13 J in Independence and Monmouth, Oregon. I am writing to request your support for **HB 2536**.

You will hear about the statistics of child hunger and that studies show a strong correlation between hunger and learning delays. My staff and I see this every day in our work. Free school meals during the pandemic has made a huge impact in my community. We have been able to hand out almost half-a-million sack meals in the last 14 months. No questions asked. Stressed families, children in child care and youth programs, and older students fending for themselves have benefitted from being able to access free meals at every one of our schools.

State lawmakers prioritized expanding income eligibility for increased access to 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. Not having expanded income eligibility as a default 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 clarified.** 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, as a former reduced lunch kid, I know the importance of food security to the families in my community. Children should never have to fear going hungry, especially while in school. I urge Oregon lawmakers to support HB 2536 to ensure equitable access to school meals across Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Alex Singer  
Nutrition Director  
Central School District 13 J  
Independence and Monmouth, Oregon