

TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Matt Newell-Ching, Public Policy Manager
RE: Support for HB 2536 to Strengthen Access to School Meals
DATE: May 5, 2021



Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, 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 Hunger-Free Schools provisions in the Student Success Act's (SSA) make Oregon the nation's leader in ensuring access to school meals. It 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.

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.

This change will be important because it will ensure that families applying for assistance with school meals will receive consistent guidelines regardless of what school district they live in. And it simplifies administration of this provision for school districts and the Department of Education. This is good for kids, families, and Oregon.

We were thrilled that HB 2536 passed unanimously (57-0) in the Oregon House on April 14th, and we hope for a similar vote in the Senate. We urge swift passage of HB 2536.

Oregon Food Bank
Headquarters /
Metro Services
7900 NE 33rd Drive
Portland, OR 97211
503-282-0555

Oregon Food Bank
Washington County
Services
1870 NW 173rd Ave
Beaverton, OR 97006
503-439-6510

Oregon Food Bank
Tillamook County
Services
PO Box 1344
Tillamook, OR 97141
503-842-3154

Oregon Food Bank
Southeast Oregon
Services
773 S Oregon Street
Ontario, OR 97914
541-889-9206

Columbia Gorge
Food Bank
3610 Crates Way
The Dalles, OR 97058
541-370-2333

