



March 15, 2023

To: House Committee on Education
From: Our Children Oregon, The Children's Agenda
RE: Support for HB 3030, Healthy School Meals for All

Dear Co-Chair Campos, Co-Chair Valderrama, and Members of Committee,

The Children's Agenda, convened by Our Children Oregon, brings together ~127 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the well-being of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our collective created a 2023 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families.

When kids are hunger-free, they focus and learn better in school, which sets the stage for them to excel in many other areas of life. Unfortunately, far too many kids in Oregon are not receiving the healthy start they need and deserve. According to OCO's Oregon KIDS COUNT Data Cards, 15.4% of children are experiencing food insecurity, which is about 132,500 kids in Oregon.¹ Furthermore, Lincoln County has the highest number of children (24.4%) who are experiencing child food insecurity in Oregon, followed by Coos (23.6%) and Grant (23.4%) counties. Research shows that food insecurity can have major impacts on children's well-being. A 2017 review found that even small levels of food insecurity impacted mental health and academic performance, such as a higher likelihood of repeating grades, lower reading and math performance, and higher rates of anxiety and depression in students.²

Healthy School Meals for All — offering school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge to families — helps ensure that all children have the nutrition they need to grow and thrive. Providing healthy breakfast and lunch options will improve educational, health, and economic outcomes for students. In addition, universal meals reduce the stigma sometimes associated with school meals, advance racial equity, eliminate “school lunch debt,” and support parents.

Oregon made progress in the last several years to ensure that more students are well-nourished and prepared to learn, but we can do more. In 2019, the Oregon Legislature passed the historic Student Success Act, which expanded access to nutritious meals at school for students facing food insecurity. Oregon has since doubled the number of schools offering breakfast and lunch at

¹ <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/publications/oregon-kids-count/>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28134627/>

no charge to students compared to 2019, before the pandemic. However, with the expiration of the federal waiver, 45% of Oregon schools are no longer able to provide this opportunity.

The pandemic served as a valuable lesson on the critical importance of providing healthy meals to *all* students. **HB 3030 (with the amendment) provides a pathway for Oregon to develop a proven solution.** HB 3030 will:

- Establish the “Healthy School Meals for All Task Force” to design and recommend a proposal to the legislature to make it viable for every school in Oregon to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge to families; and
- Take advantage of potential federal changes that would extend breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge by requiring Oregon to apply to participate in a state option that would allow the entire state of Oregon to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision if that option becomes available in the future.

HB 3030 puts Oregon on the pathway for Oregon to achieving Healthy School Meals for All for Oregon’s students. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve child well-being across the state, and we urge your support for HB 3030.

Sincerely,

Our Children Oregon
Oregon Food Bank
American Heart Association
Catholic Community Services
Clackamas Women’s Services
Community Action Team, Inc.
Decoding Dyslexia Oregon
FACT Oregon
Families First Parent Resource Center
Friends of Outdoor School
IRCO
Oregon AG’s Sexual Assault Task Force
Oregon Alliance of YMCAs
Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries
Oregon CASA Network
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials

Oregon Education Association
Oregon Environmental Council
Oregon Hunger Task Force
Oregon Kids Read
Oregon Nurse Association
Oregon Pediatric Society
Oregon Primary Care Association
Oregon PTA
Oregon Resource Family Alliance
Oregon School-Based Health Alliance
Oregon Student Voice
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Prevent Child Abuse Oregon
Reach Out and Read Northwest
SEIU 503
Southern Oregon Success
Urban League of Portland
Washington County Kids