



# Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: March 14, 2023

TO: Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Wright and Hudson, and Members of the House Committee on Education

FROM: Oregon Pediatric Society

SUBJECT: Support for HB 3030 – Healthy School Meals for All

The Oregon Pediatric Society strongly supports HB 3030, Healthy School Meals for All. Children need adequate nutrition to grow and develop normally and to prevent both acute and chronic illnesses. Reliable and nutritious food is also associated with improved cognitive function and emotional well-being.

The Oregon Pediatric Society (OPS) is the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP has identified food insecurity—the limited or uncertain access to enough food—as a priority health issue for children. Food insecurity results in multiple adverse effects: poor health status, mental health problems, poor educational outcomes, and food anxiety. Food insecurity is also associated with obesity. The AAP recommends that pediatricians screen for food insecurity and connect families with federal and local resources.

According to the Oregon Hunger Task Force, one in FIVE Oregon children are food insecure, and this number is even higher in immigrant communities. More than 550,000 children and adolescents attend Oregon's public schools, and children consume up to 35-40% of their daily nutrition in school. We know that school meals have a huge impact on the quality of nutrition that students receive. According to the Food Research and Action Center, access to school meals reduces food insecurity and obesity rates, and improves other health outcomes for children.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends healthy school meals for all, and notes that access to school meals reduces school absenteeism. CDC research shows a strong relationship between health and educational performance, and that healthful nutrition is associated with improved school performance.

Only half of eligible students participate in the Oregon school meal plans, and many families who are food insecure do not even currently qualify for school meals. We also know there is significant stigma and shame for families who need help, which can be a major barrier to asking for and accessing assistance. Although immigration status is not considered when families are applying for school meals, many immigrant families are afraid of applying for any sort of assistance. Universally offering school meals removes those barriers and reduces disparities, giving all students access to nutritious meals. This, in turn, allows them to focus on learning.



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Providing school meals will ensure that all students, regardless of household income, will have access to consistent, high-quality nutrition, helping prevent acute and chronic disease; decrease anxiety; and improve cognition. Moreover, children could receive these benefits without suffering the social stigma of needing assistance.

The Oregon Pediatric Society strongly supports HB 3030 and urges you to vote yes on this bill.

## References:

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