



Date: March 15th, 2023
To: House Committee on Education
From: Crystalyn Black, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland
Re: Support for Universal School Meals, HB 3030

Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Hudson and Wright, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 3030. My name is Crystalyn Black, I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life to thrive across Oregon and SW Washington.

We are writing to offer support for House Bill 3030 because no child should experience hunger. Before the pandemic, 1 in 11 Oregonians were food insecure and now, more than 1 in 8 are living with hunger.¹ According to the USAA report "Household Food Security in the United States in 2021" "Black households experienced food insecurity at a rate of 19.8%, compared to the national average of 10.2%."² During March 2020, the federal government passed a series of waivers aimed at expanding access to school lunches. As a result, we saw an estimated increase of 10 million children utilizing the program.³ These waivers helped expand food access to rural and suburban communities where access to resources can be limited due to a large geographic area. They also helped families that barely missed the income threshold but still faced struggles providing food for their children. They also helped to counteract the cost of food inflation which has impacted a school's ability to provide access to lunches. However, these waivers expired last June which led to thousands of children now vulnerable to hunger again.

Hunger is a function of our society failing to meet the most fundamental needs of its people. When someone is hungry it highlights inequities in housing, healthcare, employment, and the environment because a person is not able to adequately access the tools they need to survive. According to the "State of Black Oregon 2015" Report, there are two key factors that play a role in reducing deadly health problems such as high blood pressure, risks of heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers: stress and nutrition.⁴ When a family has access to consistent and reliable nutrition, they reap multiple health benefits and reduce their chances of developing chronic diseases.

Not only are Oregonians not getting adequate nutrition, but many do not have access to nutritious foods as they live in what is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a food desert, where the area "tend to have smaller populations, higher rates of abandoned or vacant homes, and residents who have lower levels of education, lower incomes, and higher unemployment."⁵ Nutrition is important and schools are the one place where kids should be guaranteed nutritional foods.

House Bill 3030 fills in the resource gap to get meals for our children. As amended, HB 3030 creates a "Healthy School Meals for All Task Force" which will create a proposal that expands

¹ Oregon Food Bank, "[Oregon Food Bank Network's 10 Hunger Facts](#)", 2022

² USDA, "[Household Food Security in the United States in 2021](#)", 2022.

³ Rachel M. Cohen, "[A program that helps millions of hungry kids is about to Expire](#)", 2022

⁴ Urban League of Portland, "[State of Black Oregon 2015](#)", pg.16, 2015.

⁵ United States Department of Agriculture, "[Characteristics and Influential Factors of Food Deserts](#)", pg.1, 2012.



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access to breakfast and lunch for all students. By establishing a Universal School Meal Account to reimburse Oregon school districts for some costs incurred in providing meals that are not currently covered by the state, federal or other sources we are ensuring that children continue to get fed. This is an opportunity to make a meaningful dent in food insecurity rates. The Urban League of Portland urges your support for House Bill 3030.

Respectfully,

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