

MAXINE E. DEXTER, MD
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DISTRICT 33



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

To: Members of the House Committee on Education

Date: March 15, 2023

Subject: Support [HB 3030](#) -1

Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Wright and Hudson:

For the record, my name is Dr. Maxine Dexter and I am honored to be the State Representative for House District 33, which includes NW & Downtown Portland, Linnton, and Cathedral Park. I respectfully submit this testimony in support of HB 3030 and the -1 amendment, which will create a pathway to ensure free school offerings for all students in Oregon's K-12 schools.

In 1943, the psychologist Abraham Maslow laid out in his seminal paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation," a framework for understanding universal human needs and how these needs are dependent on one another. The foundation of what we now call "Maslow's hierarchy of needs" rests on ensuring we have our physiological needs met. This encompasses stable access to clean air, warmth, water, shelter, and food.

As legislators we are accountable for protecting the health and safety of Oregonians. We are failing to maintain access to the most basic needs of children by failing to guarantee universal access to free meals while at school. A pre-pandemic estimate by Feeding American finds that 1 in 8 children are facing food insecurity¹ and in many areas this is far more prevalent. In Oregon, 33 percent of those receiving emergency food are children² and 15% of students in K-12 lack adequate nutrition at home³. And still, according to the Oregon Hunger Task Force, of these students, more than one-third do not qualify for free meals at school. With the rapidly rising cost of food and fresh produce relative to income and/or the significant time it takes working parents to shop and prepare meals, many Oregon families are struggling to provide one of Maslow's key pillars for their growing children – food.

I strongly believe that the investments we make across our state in education, health care, and social services are largely wasted if Oregonians don't have their most basic needs met. Schools should be places of safety, support and even refuge for children and to do that we must provide

¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/oregon>

² <https://marionpolkfoodshare.org/about/info-about-hunger/#:~:text=Across%20the%20state%20of%20Oregon,receiving%20emergency%20food%20are%20children.>

³ <https://www.oregonhungertaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Oregon-Hunger-Task-Force-2022-County-Fact-Sheet-Data-All-Counties.pdf>

them with ample funding and infrastructure to care holistically for our youth. The Healthy School Meals for All framework will ensure that students have access to the nutrition that they need to learn and thrive in an educational environment. Dozens of studies have established that when students eat nutritious breakfast and lunches, their mental, physical, and social cognition and participation in class increases significantly. Additionally, the program will revolutionize the culture and accessibility of school lunch from the ground up. As the Food Research and Action Center finds, when school lunch is universally accessible, stigma-filled connotations and the label of “welfare meals” is disrupted; significant administrative time spent on certifying meal categories and other logistics are reinvested in the education and curriculum sphere; and, as participation in the program increases, so do the resources for lunch staff and the ability for districts to secure fresher and more balanced meals.⁴ On a personal note, this was my son’s experience as a Portland Public School student – when lunches were universally available to all at no cost more students in his high school ate on campus, were able to get through the lines faster and this clearly led to a noticeable decrease in stigma and improvement in the feeling of community at his school.

I implore you to not give up on this effort! If providing food to our children universally isn’t worthy of our investment as a state, what is? We must invest in this program, developing the infrastructure and commitment to sustained investment to create an effective and equitable program model. HB 3030 and its -1 amendment addresses these vital next steps.

I want to acknowledge and thank the efforts of Representative Neron, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, COSA, and Portland Public Schools, among others, for helping us make the vision for healthy school meals a reality. With and only with full and ambitious funding, HB 3030 will create a tangible path forward to attack food insecurity at its root by removing time and cost barriers to nutritious school meals for families. I hope you will stand with me, committed to making sure every K-12 student has free access to the healthy food they need to be successful students while giving peace of mind to our community that we are caring holistically for our families.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maxine Dexter', written in a cursive style.

Representative Maxine Dexter, M.D.
House District 33 (NW & Downtown Portland, Linnton, & Cathedral Park)

⁴ <https://frac.org/blog/top-10-reasons-to-support-free-healthy-school-meals-for-all>

