

February 20, 2025

TO: House Committee on Education
FROM: Ali King, Our Children Oregon
SUBJECT: Support for HB 3435

Chair Neron, Vice-Chair McIntire, Vice-Chair Dobson, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ali King and I am the Policy and Advocacy Director for Our Children Oregon (OCO), a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. The Children's Agenda, convened by OCO, brings together a coalition of more than 135 organizations statewide dedicated to improving child wellbeing in Oregon. **HB 3435, School Meals for All, is a top priority of the 2025 Children's Agenda and has strong and broad support from our partner organizations across Oregon.**

Over my many years as a parent, preschool co-founder, Congressional Caseworker, and Policy and Advocacy Director, I have seen how hunger impacts a child's ability to focus, learn, and thrive. As part of my testimony in support of HB 3435, I would like to share a story about something I witnessed firsthand while I was growing up.

My friend and her two sisters, who lived down the block from me, tragically lost their father in a car accident when they were very young. Needless to say, the family was devastated. Although money was tight, that wasn't the main barrier for these particular kids when it came to school lunches.

Their mother, now a widow and the sole provider and caregiver for three young children, was overwhelmed and worked overtime to provide for her children. There were many mornings when she was unable to help the kids get ready for school or make their lunches. My friend regularly came to school without having eaten breakfast and brought little or no lunch with her. Her other friends and I shared our lunches with her whenever possible, but she still rarely got enough protein and calories to stop her hunger pains. I remember her telling me how much her stomach hurt due to hunger. She struggled to focus in the classroom and was often too tired to play with her classmates during PE or after school. This was a child whose family could afford food, but couldn't provide consistent meals for other reasons.

Children simply cannot focus and learn when they are hungry. Many income-based programs exist to provide meals for kids, but, as noted in this story, **there are many other barriers besides income that impact whether or not a child goes hungry during the school day.**

I appreciate having the opportunity to share this story with you and I strongly urge you to **vote YES on HB 3435, School Meals for All.**

Thank you,



Ali King, *Policy and Advocacy Director, Our Children Oregon*

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