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On Behalf Of:

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Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3435

I was raised by teen parents who worked hard but struggled to make ends meet. The free lunch program was a lifeline for my family, ensuring that I had at least one meal each school day. But with that meal came something else—stigma. Our lunch cards were a different color than the other kids'. Everyone knew what that meant. I remember the embarrassment of handing over my card, feeling singled out and different. No child should have to experience that kind of shame just to have a meal.

Now, as the Executive Director of a food pantry, I see the same struggles playing out in a different way. Every day, I meet kids who rely on school meals as their only consistent source of nutrition. I see the quiet hunger in their eyes, the way they cling to the food we offer, knowing they may not have anything else to eat until the next school day. Parents tell us how they skip meals so their kids can eat, and how summer and school breaks are some of the hardest times of the year because school meals aren't there to fill the gap.

No child should have to wonder where their next meal will come from. No child should have to feel shame for needing help. School Meals for All ensures that every student, regardless of their family's financial situation, has access to the food they need to learn, grow, and thrive—without stigma, without barriers.

Hunger doesn't take a day off. And feeding kids isn't just a kindness; it's a necessity. When we invest in universal school meals, we invest in the future of our children and our communities. I urge you to support this critical initiative and ensure that no child has to face the same struggles I did—or the ones I see every day.