

Submitter: Lynne L Shore, President
On Behalf Of: Oregon School Nutrition Association
Committee: Committee on Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3435
To: House Committee on Education

Subject: Support HB3435

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

The Oregon School Nutrition Association, on behalf of our 728 members, consisting of front-line school cooks, Registered Dietitians, food service manufacturers and other child nutrition professionals, express our strong support for HB 3435 and the implementation and funding of healthy meals at no cost to all students in our K-12 schools. We, as child nutrition professionals, are greatly involved in the daily operations of school meal programs, we have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that access to nutritious meals has on our students' well-being and academic performance.

No cost healthy school meals for all students ensure that that every child, regardless of their family's financial situation, has access to the nutrition they need to thrive. HB 3435 not only addresses food insecurity but also removes the stigma associated with free or reduced-price meals, creating a more inclusive and supportive school environment for Oregon's children.

Hunger is a significant barrier to learning. Students who come to school hungry are unable to concentrate, participate fully in class, or perform to the best of their abilities. By providing meals at no cost to students, we can help eliminate this barrier and give all students an equitable opportunity to succeed.

Additionally, no cost school meals for all students simplifies the administrative process for schools, allowing us to focus more on providing high-quality meals and less on paperwork, eligibility determinations, and the management of school lunch debt. This program simplification can lead to cost savings and better resource allocation, ultimately benefiting our entire school community.

Many parents can't afford to pay for school meals for their children due to circumstances that the federal free and reduced meal program income guidelines do not take into consideration. Circumstances such as medical expenses, high rent costs, poor performing seasonal businesses such as farming and ranching. Per the federal rate, they do not qualify for free or reduced meals, but they do not have enough discretionary income to pay for their child's school meals. These children go without eating, It is at no fault of the parents, as they truly don't have the funds to pay for the healthy school meals their children need to succeed. We, as school nutrition professionals, try our hardest to make sure every child has the nutrition that they need. Even if it means we use our own spare change and pay for their meals ourselves. Some of our members recycle pop cans from school staffrooms and basketball games just to collect funds so that kids like this can eat.

Investing in our children's nutrition is an investment in the future of our students, our schools, our communities and Oregon's future. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and for your continued support of our schools and children who attend them.

Sincerely,



Lynne Shore, President

Oregon School Nutrition Association