

TO: House Committee on Education

FROM: Aleida Robles/ Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon

SUBJECT: Yes on HB 3435

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

My name is Aleida Robles, and I am a Youth Advisory Leader at Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO) and a student in Woodburn. I am in strong support of House Bill 3435, School Meals for all.

When I was younger, seeing kids' faces light up as we waited in line for lunch and searched for our favorite meal on the menu always created a cheerful environment at my school. I vividly remember seeing how vibrant each student was as they enjoyed eating their meal without any worries. To me, these meals did more than just provide food. These meals brought ease to my classmates, as it allowed us students to focus and feel well-supported in our learning. I've always had this support and experience, but tens of thousands of students in Oregon still don't get to experience this.

At school, there are many moments where I recall feeling tired and low-energized whenever I missed breakfast or skipped lunch, which always made me feel exhausted at the end of the day. When missing a meal or not having access to free nutritious meals, students are faced with distress. It is truly difficult to concentrate on an empty stomach, which makes it even harder for us students to learn. At school, students should feel a sense of belonging and feel supported at all costs because, as a school and a community, we have the responsibility to ensure that each student, no matter their household income, should have everything they need to be successful.

Additionally, the lack of free school meal programs at schools is making students' lives even more difficult. So many students are already facing mental health problems due to at-home issues like financial stress or family problems. Missing a meal puts even more toxic stress onto our youths if they do not have their basic needs met. It is important that every student receives free school lunches and breakfast programs, as our students essentially need these resources that will help improve their academic success and thrive in an equitable environment.

From a student perspective, schools hold the responsibility to ensure that their students are supported by implementing the School Meals for All Program. Therefore, it is essential that incorporating the School Meals for All (program) in all Oregon Schools will significantly increase students' productivity, and they feel more supported in their

educational journeys. I believe every student deserves a free nutritious meal no matter their income or from what school district they come from. Each student has the right to a meal.

We cannot let anyone suffer from hunger, especially when we have the resources to expand this program. We must expand the SMFA program to support the needs of our students and youth, and create a just and equitable environment for all.

Thank you.