



**To:** Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the House Committee on Education  
**From:** Bridget Budbill, Legislative Advocate at the Oregon Law Center  
**Re:** House Bill 3435 – Free School Meals for All  
**Date:** February 24, 2025

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the House Committee on Education:

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a legal aid organization providing free, civil legal services to low-income Oregonians. **We are thrilled to support House Bill (HB) 3435, which would make free school meals possible for all kids in Oregon public schools, regardless of income level.** Oregon is among states that saw food insecurity grow during the last few years, overall.<sup>1</sup> Food insecurity rates have risen more in our rural areas recently, and single moms have long been the group with the highest food insecurity rates in Oregon.<sup>2</sup>

HB 3435 would allow kids all over Oregon, who don't have enough to eat at home, to count on free meals at school, meaning they can pay attention to learning and building their futures, not being hungry. It also means that kids who count on free school meals won't feel singled-out for needing help (and who may now choose being hungry over having their hunger seen by their teachers and peers). School meals also provide nutritious options: according to research available from the United States Department of Agriculture, kids who eat meals made by schools eat more nutritiously than kids who bring meals from home or buy it elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, when free school meals are contingent on income eligibility, there will always be families who won't qualify for nutrition assistance but still *can't* cover all food costs. HB 3435 would help *all* families, not only those who qualify as low-income. We also hope that making free school meals available to all will cut down on administrative work for school staff and families associated with managing eligibility compliance.

Thank you for considering HB 3435; we hope you will support this great bill.

Sincerely,

Bridget Budbill

***The Oregon Law Center's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services.***

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbitt, M. et al. (2024). *Household Food Security in the United States in 2023*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Table 5, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=109895> (Oregon saw statistically significant increases in families that experience low food security and very low food security over the last period measured).

<sup>2</sup> McElhaney, J., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Pandemic Increases in Oregon's Food Insecurity (2021-2023)*, Oregon Policy Analysis Lab, Oregon State University, pages 2-3, [https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/2024-11/Oregon\\_Food\\_Insecurity\\_Rates\\_2021-2023\\_november\\_2024.pdf](https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/2024-11/Oregon_Food_Insecurity_Rates_2021-2023_november_2024.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> United State Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, "Lunches Consumed from School are the Most Nutritious." June 2021, available at [https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS\\_infographic5\\_SchoolLunchesAretheMostNutritious.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS_infographic5_SchoolLunchesAretheMostNutritious.pdf) (showing, for example, that kids eating lunch from schools ate more than twice as many vegetables as kids who ate lunch from home or bought it other places).