



February 24, 2025

CareOregon Support for HB 3435

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntyre, and Members of the Committee:

CareOregon is a community non-profit organization serving members of the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) for 30 years. We currently manage OHP benefits for over 500,000 Oregonians. CareOregon wholly owns two coordinated care organizations (CCOs), Jackson Care Connect and Columbia Pacific CCO. We also are a founding member of Health Share of Oregon, managing an integrated community network and the behavioral health benefit for all Health Share of Oregon members. We also serve statewide through our tribal care coordination benefit. Our mission is to inspire and partner to create quality and equity in individual and community health.

Driven by our mission and in service to the nearly 140,000 school-aged children receiving OHP benefits through CareOregon, we are in strong support of HB 3435. Universal school meals play a crucial role in addressing the social determinants of health and mitigating the long-term health consequences associated with food insecurity and poor nutrition. By providing free breakfast and lunch to all students, HB 3435 ensures that children receive essential nutrients for growth, development, and academic success. Beyond immediate benefits, universal school meals contribute to long-term health equity by reducing chronic disease risks, improving mental well-being, and fostering better socioeconomic outcomes.

Food insecurity, a key determinant of health, can lead to nutritional deficiencies and increased vulnerability to illness. HB 3545 complements the narrower health-related social need nutrition benefit authorized in Oregon's 1115 Medicaid waiver and directly addresses food insecurity by guaranteeing that every student has access to healthy meals, regardless of their family's financial status. Additionally, forward-thinking universal school meal policies contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and poor health. Children who receive proper nutrition are more likely to be attentive in class, complete their education, secure stable employment, and achieve better health outcomes as adults. This long-term impact highlights the importance of investing in policies that promote food security and equitable access to nutrition.

We appreciate the Legislature's continued attention and commitment to early interventions that promote the long-term health and wellness of the individuals and communities we serve.

Sincerely,

Stefan Shearer
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CareOregon

