

To: House Committee on Education

From: Children's Institute

Date: February 24, 2025

RE: In Support of HB 3435

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

I am writing to express our support for HB 3435, School Meals for All. Expanding access to School Meals for All is a crucial step toward ensuring that every child in Oregon has the opportunity to thrive—academically, physically, and socially. Investing in school nutrition means investing in the future of our children and our communities.

Hunger is a growing issue in Oregon, and ensuring that all students—including those in district preschool programs—have access to nutritious meals is essential. School meals provide a reliable source of nourishment, helping to combat food insecurity so no child has to go hungry during the school day.

Good nutrition is directly linked to student success. Children who receive regular, healthy meals are better able to focus, participate actively in class, and perform well academically. Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive and physical development, and ensuring proper nutrition at this stage sets the foundation for lifelong health, higher educational achievement, and greater economic mobility.

Universal school meals foster equity by eliminating the stigma associated with free or reduced-price lunch programs. When all students have access to the same meals, it creates a more inclusive and supportive school environment. Shared mealtimes also strengthen social connections, helping to build a sense of belonging and community among students.

By funding school meals for all students, from preschool through high school, we are making a long-term investment in the well-being and success of Oregon's children. We

urge you to vote on HB 3435 to expand access to nutritious meals so every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential—academically, socially, and beyond.

Elena Barreto,
Senior Early Childhood Policy Advisor,
Children's Institute