



WOMEN'S FOUNDATION of OREGON

Invest in Women. Invest in Oregon. Invest in Change.

FROM: Women's Foundation of Oregon
SUBJECT: Yes on HB 3435
Date: February 24, 2025

Dear House Committee on Education,

The Women's Foundation of Oregon is writing to you as concerned community members to urge your support for **HB 3435, "School Meals for All,"** which would ensure that every student in our state has access to nutritious meals during the school day. This initiative is not only essential for the well-being of our children but also for the long-term success of our communities. As a state and nation we are facing a lot of uncertainty, and food scarcity for our children should not be one of our worries.

1. Addressing Hunger and Food Insecurity

One of the most pressing issues our students face is hunger. It is well-documented that children who do not have access to sufficient, healthy meals are more likely to experience difficulty concentrating, lower academic performance, and behavioral issues. By providing meals to all students, we ensure that no child is left behind due to circumstances beyond their control, such as family income or food insecurity. Hunger insecurity affects nearly 1 million Oregonians. Communities of color and single mothers experience hunger at rates 2 to 3 times higher than the general population.

2. Promoting Equity and Reducing Stigma

Currently, only students from low-income families qualify for free or reduced-price meals. This system unintentionally creates stigma and divides children based on their family's financial situation. By providing meals for all, we remove this barrier and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for every student, regardless of their background. This decreases bullying, disciplinary actions, and adverse outcomes in our schools which are already stretched very thin.

3. Supporting Educational Outcomes

Studies consistently show that children who are well-nourished perform better in school. School meals have a significant impact on academic achievement, attendance, and overall health. By ensuring that every student has access to nutritious food, we are investing in the future of our students and our society. Several studies show that nutritional status can directly affect mental capacity among school-aged children. For example, iron deficiency, even in early stages, can decrease dopamine transmission, thus negatively impacting cognition. Deficiencies in other vitamins and minerals are shown to inhibit cognitive abilities and mental concentration. There are also a number of studies showing that improvements in nutrient intake can influence the cognitive ability and intelligence levels of school-aged children.



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4. Public Health and Nutrition

By guaranteeing all students access to healthy meals, we can combat the rise of childhood obesity and other health issues linked to poor nutrition. A well-balanced diet supports children's growth, cognitive development, and emotional well-being, which are critical for lifelong health and success. This is a small investment in the continued health and well-being of our children. With these guaranteed supports we will help to better care for our communities and our collective future.

For all these reasons, WFO strongly supports **HB 3435, "School Meals for All,"** and urges you to champion this cause. This is a crucial step toward ensuring that every child in our state has the resources they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. We respectfully ask that you lend your full support to this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your support in making this vision a reality for all of our children.

Sincerely,

Women's Foundation of Oregon

Sources:

The Status of Hunger in Oregon <https://www.oregonhungertaskforce.org/research/>

Pollitt E. (1993). Iron deficiency and cognitive function. *Annual Review of Nutrition*, 13, 521–537.

Chenoweth, W. (2007). Vitamin B complex deficiency and excess. In R. Kliegman, H. Jenson, R. Behrman, & B. Stanton (Eds.), *Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics*, 18th edition. Philadelphia: Saunders.

Lieberman, H. (2003). Nutrition, brain function, and cognitive performance. *Appetite*, 40, 245–254.