



February 25, 2025

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the House Committee on Education

Re: House Bill 3435 – School Meals for All, Support

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Cree Bort, and I'm a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. I have the pleasure of serving as the Advocacy and Policy Organizer for the NAYA Action Fund, a Native-led organization that builds political power and advances advocacy for Native communities in Oregon and Washington. I am writing to share my support for HB 3435, which would create school meals for all.

Have you ever gone to school wondering if you'd make it through the day without food? Have you ever sat at a lunch table watching others eat while you were turned away at the counter for insufficient funds in your lunch account? Have you ever struggled to stay awake and alert in class because there was no food at home, forcing you to skip breakfast?

For many children in Oregon, food scarcity is a daily reality. Countless students go hungry because their families cannot afford breakfast or lunch. House Bill 3435 would put an end to this hardship by establishing a free breakfast and lunch program for all students, regardless of their ability to pay. According to a recent analysis by Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, this program would save families an estimated \$1,441 per student per year. For larger families, these costs add up quickly. In today's economy, many households struggle to afford them, with housing and food expenses consuming a significant portion of their paychecks.

At NAYA, we are proud to be the home of Many Nations Academy (MNA), an alternative high school within Portland Public Schools. Many of our students experience housing insecurity, come from challenging backgrounds, or live in unstable homes. One of MNA's most valuable offerings is breakfast and lunch, including culturally relevant first foods. Our students already face barriers that feel overwhelming, but MNA provides them with a safe space to eat healthily, learn, and grow. Through wraparound, trauma informed services, alongside its academic curriculum, MNA creates an environment where students can succeed academically and beyond.

A full stomach is so important for a focused mind. Hunger in the classroom can severely impact a student's cognitive abilities, leading to decreased memory, impaired concentration, lower energy levels, and increased behavioral challenges like irritability. Chronic hunger can also have long term harmful consequences, including developmental delays, lower academic performance, and higher absenteeism. By



providing free meals to all students, we can not only combat these issues but also get rid of the stigma associated with not being able to afford a meal.

On behalf of the NAYA Action Fund, we strongly urge you to support House Bill 3435 to ensure that no child in Oregon experiences hunger during their school day.

Thank you,

Cree Bort  
Advocacy and Policy Organizer