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Testimony in Support of HB 3201 **CACFP Recipes for Healthy, Tasty, Kid-Approved Meals**

House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services
Representative Hòa Nguyễn, Chair; Representative Jules Walters, and Senators Lew Frederick and
Suzanne Weber
March 5, 2025

Testimony provided by:

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On behalf of the Food Hero Campaign at Oregon State University, we write to explain how HB 3201 will benefit Oregonians. The passing of HB3201 will benefit the state of Oregon, and in particular will strengthen the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) with the addition of recipes for Oregon children and youth that are:

- Accessible
- Nutrient dense
- Kid approved and inspired by cultures all over the world.

CACFP already contributes to the health and wellbeing of children and youth in childcare settings. This federal program reimburses childcare providers for the healthy meals and snacks they offer eligible children in their programs. Meals and snacks must meet USDA recipe requirements, which in practice can limit variety in recipe options. By supporting expanded meal and snack options and funding, this bill presents an opportunity to include recipes that are

- taste-tested and kid approved by thousands of Oregon children, youth, and their families
- simple, low cost and accessible, using ingredients that are common Oregon pantry or fridge staples
- nutritious, and inspired by go-to Oregon family favorites from cultures around the world.

Accessible recipes using simple ingredients most Oregonians can find in their neighborhood stores are crucial for delivering healthy meals and snacks in Oregon child food programs. HB 3201 aims to provide CACFP sites with recipes that use common, low-cost ingredients and are easy to convert for multiple yields. It will also support sponsors with in-depth training on meeting USDA standards for recipe preparation to make the recipes CACFP reimbursement approved. Accessibility for CACFP families is crucial, as up to one in six Oregon children are food insecure, and meals at CACFP sites are a reliable source of essential nutrients for many enrolled children. HB 3201 will strengthen CACFP's record of improving nutrition and food security for children.

Second, the passing of HB 3201 will **create 50 nutrition-packed recipes for CACFP menus available** to staff at all Oregon CACFP sites. All recipes developed by Food Hero adhere to the Food Hero Recipe Nutrition Criteria and Recipe Style Guide, with direction from nutrition educators working in communities in every Oregon County, in consultation with Oregon tribal organizations and in partnership with health experts and numerous community wellness groups. Peer-reviewed research suggests a lack of good nutrition can impact children's education, including their cognitive development, emotional regulation, and social development. The American Academy of Pediatrics links food insecurity in early childhood to lower math and reading scores, developmental delays, and increased behavioral challenges. As Oregon's reading and math scores and high school graduation rates are some of the lowest in the

nation, it is imperative that balanced nutrition be part of a wholistic early-child development solution, starting in programs like CACFP. Providing young children with nutrition-packed meals is vital for optimal brain development and HB3201 is a way to advocate for healthy development and thriving among all Oregon kids.

Lastly, but crucial to its success, HB3201 will **provide CACFP with a wide range of recipes that are Oregon kid-approved**. Rates of obesity have risen in recent decades, and new measures are needed to address this concerning trend and the high healthcare costs of obesity-related illnesses. HB3201 would be a significant step toward reversing this trend in Oregon. We know that not all healthy recipes are created equally: kids will often not eat recipes they don't like, so providing kid-approved nutrient dense options is key to improving kids' nutrition and avoiding excessive food waste as an unintended outcome. Food Hero's kid-approved recipes have been field-tested with kids in schools and at community events for over ten years. The focus of the menu/recipe development in HB3201 brings together the expertise and connections unique to Food Hero to create appealing and culturally authentic recipes approved for use in CACFP. Serving kids healthy, tasty, Oregon kid-approved recipes in their CACFP meal rotations from an early age is a strategy that may help with Oregon obesity prevention for years to come.

A key to CACFP kid-approved recipe acceptance is serving recipes similar to what kids eat and enjoy at home. Food Hero research with Oregon families suggests the average family eats culturally inspired dishes on a weekly basis as their "go-to" meals. For example, regardless of cultural heritage, the average household's weekly meal rotation often includes dishes like tacos, enchiladas, spaghetti, lasagna, and chicken and vegetable stir-fry rice bowls with a wide variety of culturally inspired sauces to add a new flavor profile to a simple dish. Food Hero research has also found that some families only eat culturally authentic recipes/dishes, which suggests that providing culturally familiar recipe options could encourage children to eat more of the healthy food options provided in their childcare settings. Via the Food Hero campaign, Oregon is one of the only states with a focus on culturally authentic kid-tested recipe development, a collaborative process with culturally specific working groups embedded in communities throughout Oregon and in partnership with experts in CACFP recipe/meal requirements.

Thus, if the bill is sponsored, culturally inspired, kid-approved, healthy, low-cost and accessible recipes will be readily available for all CACFP sites.

We urge you to support HB 3201 and ensure its passage.

Respectfully submitted,

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