



3/26/25

RE: HB 5515

Co-Chairs Ruiz and Sollman, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 5515, the ODE Budget. For the record, my name is David Wieland, and I am the CNP Policy Advocate at Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, a small anti-poverty nonprofit. We've been working with the community and legislators for decades to end hunger in the state.

I want to focus on Oregon's child nutrition programs, the \$540 million dollars that ODE administers. We're in a complex reality where we get to celebrate historic levels of school meal access in Oregon while we reckon with new uncertainty from the federal administration, who provides roughly 4/5th of that funding.

Universal School Meals

From the beginning of the last school year to today, we've gone from 55% of Oregon schools serving meals at no cost to 94%. With rising grocery costs, those meals are estimated to have a family benefit of \$1,400 per student per year, in addition to the educational benefits.

We heard moving testimony last week from Dustin Melton at ODE about a Congressional proposal to restrict access to free school meal programs. We put together estimates around the change to 60% ISP for CEP programs – that would result in a loss of free meal programs to over 900 schools and about 300,000 students in Oregon. We've also heard from meetings with US House and Senate Ag leadership that Child Nutrition Programs are not on the table. The reality is likely somewhere in between these two data points.

HB 3435, School Meals for All, is must-pass legislation for this reason. Not only does it deliver a win for Oregon's students and families by expanding free breakfast and lunch to every public school in the state, but it directs ODE and the State Board to create new criteria and situations for how to allocate that funding in the event of a loss of funding or change in federal eligibility.

In the event of a loss of federal funds, we absolutely plan to come back and make a compelling case for state funding for school meals for all – a reality that already exists for most Oregon families. HB 3435 would enable scenarios where some schools retain federal universal meal programs, some are primarily state funded universal meal programs, and some return to income based free meal programs with state funded expanded income guidelines.

None of us have a crystal ball of when and how much these federal cuts would be, but I would encourage the committee to begin considering scenarios to increase the funding to the Hunger Free Schools Account beyond the Current Service Level of \$127 M. As Co-Chair Ruiz said last week, "I cannot imagine a school day without feeding these children."

Local Food Incentives & Farm to School

The ability to keep those school meal dollars in Oregon, forge long lasting connections between local producers and schools, and serve fresh, healthy, locally grown foods to children is an incredible whole community benefit.

Unfortunately, not only are programs like USDA's Local Food for School program being cancelled but on Monday, we learned that the Trump Administration is planning to withhold federal farm-to-school program funding this year. We estimate these two programs total over \$7.5 M of lost local food purchasing incentives over the next three years.

The state Farm to School grant is what remains. Last year there were \$15 M in requests for the \$10 M grant program. In light of the removal of federal funding that benefits students and Oregon producers, it's critical that the Subcommittee increase the state Farm to School budget by at least \$2 M, stabilizing the impact of these losses and protecting those

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Last, I'd advocate for a small supplement to an unsung hero of the CNP program, the Child And Adult Care Food Program. The legislature's investment last year to keep sponsors in the program was lifesaving for hundreds of home based child care providers in Oregon. HB 3201 increases meal reimbursements, primarily to those providers, to stabilize their participation and provide healthy meals to children.

Oregon should be the best place for ensuring students have access to nutritious meals at school so they can learn, grow, and flourish. A student who has a healthy breakfast and lunch at school is more likely to have better attendance, graduate high school, and be fully present and ready to learn in the classroom. We still have the opportunity to make that a reality for every student in Oregon, and we need to work to defend that.

David Wieland
Policy Advocate
Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon