



Partners for a
**HUNGER-FREE
OREGON**

STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO SCHOOL MEALS (HB 2536)

HUNGER IN OREGON IS HIGHER THAN IT'S EVER BEEN. An estimated 1 in 4 Oregonians are now food insecure, doubling since the pandemic, with far higher rates for families with children and BIPOC communities.

WELL-NOURISHED KIDS LEARN BETTER AND STAY HEALTHIER. The wellbeing and academic success of our students is a priority for Oregon and school meals play a critical role.

HB 2536 WILL CLARIFY THE INTENT OF OREGON'S SCHOOL MEAL POLICY within the Student Success Act by ensuring the new Expanded Income Eligibility Guidelines for meals at no charge is implemented consistently across the state.

BACKGROUND

- The 2019 Student Success Act expanded access to nutritious meals at school for students facing food insecurity. The school meal policies maximize the number of schools serving universal free meals, and expanded the income eligibility guidelines for free meals at the remaining schools in Oregon.
- **The state legislature established Expanded Income Eligibility guidelines** so that all students in households that earn up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are eligible for meals at no charge. This is now consistent with eligibility for Children's Health Insurance.
- This groundbreaking state policy addresses the fact that 1-in-3 kids who live in food insecure households fall in this 186-300% FPL income range and wouldn't otherwise qualify to apply for free school meals.

THE PROBLEM

- The technical wording in the current law related to Expanded Income Eligibility will undercut its intended impact.
- **The current statute leaves room for children to go hungry in school.** While the legislature allocated funding for eligible children to receive meals under the new guidelines, it left the responsibility up to schools to opt-in. This creates the potential for some students facing hunger to not have equal access to free school meals, depending on where they live.
- It is simpler, more efficient, and more equitable to expand income eligibility consistently and automatically statewide to all schools that fall within the legislated criteria.

THE SOLUTION

- Ensure that the intent of Student Success Act is clarified by implementing consistent Expanded Eligibility Guidelines (186-300% FPL) for students at all schools that are serving school meals and collecting income applications.
- This would ensure the intended impact of the legislation at an estimated 484 schools and 38% of all k-12 students in Oregon (2019 ODE data).
- **This technical fix has no anticipated fiscal impact and it has broad support from education and anti-hunger stakeholders.**

CONTACT

Annie Kirschner | 503-595-5501 x309 | annie@oregonhunger.org

Chris Baker | 503-595-5501 x313 | chris@oregonhunger.org

HB 2536 IS SUPPORTED BY

