



**Joint Committee on Student Success
Letter in Support of HB 2760-1 and HB 2765-1
April 11, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of strong, modernized school breakfast programs through HB 2760 and HB 2765. My name is Bernadette Downey and I am a Senior Manager of Advocacy for Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign.

Share Our Strength is a national nonprofit committed to ending hunger and poverty. Through the No Kid Hungry campaign, we work to end hunger and food insecurity in America by connecting children to the federal nutrition programs, like school breakfast, that make sure they get the healthy food they need every day. In addition to our grant-making in all 50 states, we also work with schools, governors, state legislators and nonprofits to identify best practices and provide technical assistance. In Oregon, we are proud to collaborate with Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon on this work.

Share Our Strength knows the power of school meals to end childhood hunger and **strongly supports including HB 2760-1: Universal Access to School Meals and HB 2765-1: Breakfast After the Bell in the Joint Committee on Student Success bill (HB 2019)** which include proven solutions to ensure more kids receive the nutrition they need to succeed in school and in life.

School breakfast is an essential school supply. Research shows that when kids start the day with a healthy meal, it can impact test scores, attendance rates, and classroom behavior as well as long-term health and eating habits.

Breakfast is especially important for kids who are at risk of hunger. An estimated 173,000 children in Oregon today live in families that struggle to afford enough food for everyone. Even more live in families on the brink, with enough today but only one financial emergency – an unexpected illness, a car repair or broken water heater – away from hunger.

School Breakfast, however, is seriously under-utilized in Oregon. Oregon ranks just 31st in the nation in successfully connecting students to the free and reduced-price breakfast program, meaning more than 118,000 eligible students who need this meal are missing out.

Unlike the school lunch program that is embedded into the school day and reaches a larger portion of eligible children, the school breakfast program is traditionally served in the cafeteria before the school day starts.

Many families are dependent on school buses and public transportation, which makes it difficult for kids to get to school with enough time to stand in line and sit down with a tray before the school day starts. Further, students who arrive and eat school breakfast before the start of the school day face additional stigma from their peers.

Around the country and in Oregon, more schools have recognized these challenges and looked for ways to make breakfast more inclusive by including the meal as part of the school day and providing a broader array of serving methods that remove transportation challenges and shame.

This is a problem with a solution. Supporting smart policies to modernize the school breakfast program, ensuring universal free access to school meals while making school breakfast a seamless part of the school day in Oregon's highest need schools would position Oregon to be a national leader – being the first in the nation to offer universal school meals and joining nine other states that have already passed bipartisan breakfast after the bell legislation.

We know legislation can be an important tool for change. In fact, the states that first passed legislation to ensure kids have access to breakfast after the school bell rings now have the highest performing breakfast programs in the country.

Nevada is one example. After the state passed a requirement that high-need schools serve Breakfast After the Bell, breakfast participation doubled in its qualifying schools. The state's ranking jumped from 25th in the nation to 7th after one year of implementation. The state's return on investment more than doubled initial projections. For every \$1 in state monies invested to support the legislation, the Breakfast After the Bell program generated \$8 in federal school breakfast reimbursement.

School breakfast is a game-changer for students, families, and the bottom line for the Food & Nutrition Service Departments in schools. School breakfast is a simple, cost-effective way to fight hunger, improve educational outcomes, leverage new federal dollars, and help students start the day on a more equal footing.

We hear regular feedback that a breakfast program that includes all students helps build a classroom routine, a calmer start to the morning, mitigates mid-morning disruptions associated with hunger, and keeps kids in the classroom who frequently visit the nurse's office for headaches or stomach aches.

This approach works in rural and suburban communities across states like West Virginia, Washington, and Illinois, and it can be successful no matter the school district size.

We believe Oregon will make a meaningful impact on its students' outcomes through passage of HB 2760 and HB 2765. By expanding the adoption of the universal meals and requiring high poverty schools to incorporate breakfast into their school day students will have a greater chance at fulfilling their potential.

When children consistently get the healthy food they need, it helps them grow up smarter, healthier and stronger. And it takes smart, healthy, strong kids to build a smart, healthy, strong Oregon.

Thank you for taking the time to focus on this important issue. We urge you to make school breakfast a priority by including HB 2760-1: Hunger-Free Schools and HB 2765-1: Breakfast After the Bell in the Joint Committee on Student Success bill (HB 2019).