

Dear Chairs Representative Smith Warner and Senator Roblan, and members of the Joint Committee on Student Success,

I am a parent of two children in Portland Public Schools, one at Roseway Heights Middle School and one at Vestal K-5 School for Social Justice. I also work for IRCO Hunger Relief and run a food pantry at Vestal, serving about 55 families every week. I see first hand as a parent and through the food pantry how much food access impacts students and their families. About **1 in 5 kids in Oregon live in households that experience hunger**, and a third of these children don't qualify for free school meals. When students are hungry, they cannot concentrate to learn. But when they have full bellies, they are better prepared to be engaged in school. And when you take away the worry about whether or not they will have food to eat, they feel more secure, and recognize school as the safe sanctuary it should be for all children.

A couple of years ago, Vestal was part of the Community Eligibility Program, which meant that all students received free breakfast and lunch. Making food free to all reduced the stigma and the barriers of applying for free and reduced lunch. It also meant that students whose families may not qualify but still have great need had one less financial burden to carry. For a variety of reasons, some families do not feel comfortable asking for help, whether it be SNAP or Free and Reduced Lunch, even though their need is high. The bills before you would ensure these children are fed and ready to learn.

I urge you to support hunger free schools through two initiatives in the Joint Committee on Student Success bill (HB 2019):

- **Universal Access to School Meals (HB 2760-1):** Makes Oregon's schools hunger-free by filling federal funding gaps so 761 schools with the highest need can offer meals to all kids at no charge.
- **Breakfast After the Bell (HB 2765-1):** Ensures students have access to breakfast at school by ensuring that it is available after the bell at schools with the highest rates of poverty.

This is an opportunity to ensure that Oregon students have the food security they need to be engaged and successful students, and to be prepared for productive futures. Please help create Hunger-Free Schools in Oregon!

Sincerely,

Laura Spidell

315 NE 80th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97213  
[lespidell@gmail.com](mailto:lespidell@gmail.com)  
503-888-1589