

**DEB PATTERSON
STATE SENATOR/SENADORA ESTATAL
DISTRICT/DISTRITO 10**



OREGON STATE SENATE/SENADO DEL ESTADO DE OREGON

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Wright and Hudson, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Deb Patterson, State Senator from District 10, which includes South Salem, West Salem, Monmouth, and Independence. I would like to add my support to HB 3030, which would create a Universal School Meal account to reimburse school districts for providing federally reimbursable meals to students, and creates a task force on Healthy School Meals for All, which would be charged with making recommendations to offer free school meals to all children in the state.

Food insecurity is detrimental to the health of everyone, but especially impacts children. Lack of adequate calories and nutrition has significant negative effects on children's development. Federal emergency waivers that allowed schools to provide free meals to all students expired in the summer of 2022. Meanwhile, the Oregon Food Bank estimated that 1.5 million Oregonians would utilize the state's food banks and pantries in 2022, as opposed to 863,000 in 2019, and 1.7 million in 2020. This data indicates that hunger in Oregon has barely abated since the start of the pandemic. Food banks and pantries are stretched thin, and have been forced to reduce the amount of food they offer individuals. It is vital that Oregon extend, rather than pull back, the resources that families need to put food on their table, making the provision of food to Oregon's children priority.

Reimbursing school districts for offering free meals to all students would significantly reduce barriers to food access for students by allowing schools to feed students for free during their normal school day, and would increase the bandwidth of food banks and pantries by allowing the resources they offer to go further. Additionally, by making free meals available to all students, much of the stigma associated with such programs would be avoided, further expanding access. HB 3030, as amended, also provides for a task force that would allow Oregon to determine the best method to direct its efforts towards combatting child hunger in the future.

I urge your aye vote.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deb Patterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deb Patterson