

February 24, 2025

Representative Neron, Chair
House Committee on Education
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR. 97301

RE: HB 3435 – Regarding School Meals for All

Chair Neron, Vice-Chair McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to express support for HB 3435, which would ensure that free breakfast and lunches are offered to any student, regardless of their ability to pay. Multnomah County supports this policy because it will improve access to school meals and strengthen food security.

Every child deserves an equal opportunity to succeed in school, yet in Oregon, 1 out of every 6 children don't have enough food to eat. The rate is 2-3 times higher for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children. No student in Oregon should go hungry at school, no matter where they live, or how much money their family makes.

School Meals for All — offering school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge to families —helps ensure that all children have the nutrition they need to grow and thrive. Healthy School Meals for All improves educational, health, and economic outcomes for students. In addition, it reduces the stigma sometimes associated with school meals, advances racial equity, eliminates “school lunch debt,” and supports working parents.

Multnomah County plays a role in a wide range of efforts to increase food security among families and youth, including school food pantries, SNAP and WIC. The County partners with schools on supporting youth development, health and mental health services, and family resource navigation. The nutrition that students receive in school has far reaching benefits beyond the school day and we have long supported increased access to school meals.

This year, for the first time ever, all of the 7 school districts within Multnomah County are able to offer meals at no charge to all students. This is due to the visionary leadership of the Oregon legislature, which became a national leader in expanding access to school meals with the passage of the Hunger-Free Schools provisions in the Student Success Act in 2019. However, while many local families are experiencing the benefits of school meals for all policies at their schools, tens of thousands of students across the state are still left behind in schools with a stratified school meal system. These include schools with the highest wealth disparity.

The proposed changes in HB 3435 would address this gap by creating a single, statewide, permanent School Meals for All program. It would simplify the existing programs, maximize federal reimbursement, eliminate family meal debt and equip schools to serve high quality food that meets the highest nutrition standards. It will also

ensure Multnomah school districts are able to continue offering accessible, nourishing meals that support families. No-Cost meals are estimated to save Oregon families \$1,441 per student each year. Thank you for considering our comments on HB 3435. We believe that this proposal will help improve the health and wellbeing of youth across our county and the state. We respectfully request your support for this School Meals for All policy.

Sincerely,



Rachel Pearl
Deputy Director
Department of County Human Services