

My name is Amanda Orozco, and I am submitting testimony in **support of SB 1581** in my personal capacity.

I have served as a school board director and as a substitute teacher in the Gresham-Barlow School District, and in both roles, I saw firsthand how critical school meals are for students' ability to learn. Kids are **required by law to attend school**, and if they are required to be there, we have a responsibility to make sure they are fed. Hunger in school is not just a family issue, it directly affects **learning, behavior, and attendance**.

When I was growing up in Utah, I received free school meals. My mother always reminded me to eat; at the time, I thought she was strict. Looking back, I see she wanted me fed without burdening me with knowledge of our family's financial struggles. One time in high school, my mother forgot to submit the paperwork for free meals. I didn't have money to pay, and a cafeteria worker took my meal from my hands in front of my peers. I remember feeling embarrassed, hungry, and powerless. No child should experience that because of paperwork or a family's temporary financial situation.

SB 1581 eliminates these barriers. **Universal meals remove paperwork, reduce administrative costs to process/collect, and prevent unpaid meal debt from creating stress for families and staff.** Federal USDA reimbursements cover a portion of meal costs, and state funds reimburse schools for the remainder. This is an **efficient use of dollars**, and research shows schools offering universal meals see **higher participation, better nutrition, improved health, and fewer disciplinary incidents**, meaning we get measurable results for our investment.

Even families who don't technically qualify as low-income are facing rising costs. Universal meals relieve pressure for **all working families**, making this program equitable and practical.

Every child required to be in school should have access to a **nutritious meal**, without stigma or fear. SB 1581 ensures students can **learn and thrive**, and it does so efficiently, equitably, and responsibly.

I urge the committee to support SB 1581.

Thank you for considering my testimony.