

# OREGON ATTORNEY GENERAL'S SEXUAL ASSAULT TASK FORCE



## SUPPORT SB 1581 SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION FEBRUARY 3, 2026

Dear Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for considering this testimony. On behalf of the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force (Oregon SATF), **we are submitting testimony in support of SB 1581, which provides food for Oregon's school-aged children.**

*Formed in 1999 by then Attorney General Hardy Meyers, the Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force (or Oregon SATF) is a statewide, nongovernmental nonprofit. Our mission is to facilitate and support a collaborative, survivor-centered approach to the prevention of and response to sexual violence. We accomplish our mission by advancing primary prevention and providing multi-disciplinary training and technical assistance to responders in Oregon and nationally.*

### **Food access is a protective factor against violence**

Public health and prevention research consistently demonstrates that **food security is a foundational protective factor for children**. Adequate nutrition supports healthy brain development, emotional regulation, and executive functioning. These capacities are essential for learning, coping with stress, and forming safe relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Children experiencing food insecurity face significantly elevated risks of neglect, maltreatment, and exposure to violence, including sexual violence.<sup>2</sup> Food insecurity is strongly associated with household stress, caregiver depression, and instability, all well-established risk factors for child abuse and neglect.<sup>3</sup>

**From a prevention perspective, ensuring food access is not ancillary to safety; it is central to it.**

### **Hunger increases vulnerability; stability reduces risk.**

For children, food insecurity is associated with:

- Increased behavioral and emotional challenges
- Social isolation and stigma
- School disengagement and absenteeism
- Reduced likelihood of help-seeking or disclosure

Conversely, **stable access to food functions as a buffering condition**. By reducing daily stressors, food security helps stabilize families and lowers the cumulative risk factors associated with violence and abuse.<sup>5</sup>

### **Schools as protective environments**

Schools are one of the most consistent and trusted points of contact for children experiencing abuse or neglect. Educators and school staff are often the first to observe warning signs or receive disclosures when young people experience violence and abuse, when these environments are associated with health, safety, and belonging.

Strong attachment to school is a well-documented **protective factor against violence, exploitation, and victimization.**<sup>6</sup>

**School Meals for All strengthens schools' protective role by:**

- **Supporting student regulation, attention, and academic success**
- **Reducing disciplinary incidents linked to hunger and stress (No-cost meal programs reduce suspensions at a rate comparable to restorative justice programs)**
- **Reducing stigma and bullying around school meal access, helping low-income students feel safer and more included, allowing them to focus on learning, rather than social pressure, hunger, and instability**

Universal school meals contribute to safer, more trauma-informed learning environments – a key component of effective violence prevention.<sup>7</sup>

### **Universal access matters**

Prevention science is clear that **stigma undermines safety**. Targeted or means-tested food programs, while important, can unintentionally isolate children, and discourage participation. Stigma has been shown to reduce help-seeking behaviors and deepen vulnerability for children already at risk.<sup>8</sup>

Universal school meals eliminate this barrier. **By ensuring that every child eats, every day, School Meals for All normalizes access, preserves dignity, and strengthens inclusion. These conditions support violence and abuse prevention for our state's young people.**

### **An upstream investment in prevention**

Violence prevention is most effective when it is **upstream**, addressing root causes and strengthening protective conditions before harm occurs.<sup>9</sup> **Food security is recognized by the CDC and other public health authorities as a key protective condition that supports family stability, child wellbeing, and community safety.**<sup>10</sup>

**School Meals for All represents a smart, evidence-based investment that aligns with Oregon's commitment to prevention, equity, and child wellbeing.**

**On behalf of Oregon SATF and our statewide Violence and Abuse Prevention Program, we enthusiastically urge you to vote "yes" on SB 1581, and support School Meals for All.**

Ensuring that children are fed is not only a moral responsibility, it is a proven strategy to reduce vulnerability, strengthen protection, and prevent violence before it occurs.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



**Shannon Rose**, on behalf of the Oregon SATF Violence + Abuse Prevention Program

**Executive Director**  
**Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force**

#### **Footnotes / Citations**

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