

Submitter: Erin Maidlow
On Behalf Of: Umpqua Valley Farm to School
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1581

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

My name is Erin Maidlow, and I live in Douglas County, Oregon. I am submitting testimony in strong support of SB 1581: School Meals for All.

SB 1581 ensures that every student can access breakfast and lunch at school at no cost, regardless of income. This is a critical step to addressing hunger during an affordability crisis and ensuring that students can focus on learning rather than worrying about food.

I am especially encouraged that SB 1581 makes breakfast accessible after the start of the school day, recognizing that many students arrive late due to transportation barriers or family work schedules. Allowing breakfast to be served in the classroom and counted as instructional time ensures students are nourished without losing valuable learning time.

The bill also reduces administrative burdens for schools by eliminating meal applications, income verification, and unpaid meal debt collection. Just as importantly, it protects students from stigma and meal shaming, helping create school environments rooted in dignity, equity, and inclusion.

Umpqua Valley Farm to School is a nonprofit organization serving rural communities in Southwestern Oregon, where we are fortunate that most of the schools already participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) which provides free school meals. This is critical in our area where students face higher than average rates of food insecurity and childhood poverty than elsewhere in the state. School meals provide stability in the lives of our students and ensure that they can focus throughout the day on their school work without worrying about upset, empty tummies because they don't have food available. Free meals means no stigma while students are in the lunch line and the attention being drawn to the students who don't have money.

In my personal life, I was a single mother for eight years and we faced food insecurity. My child was supposed to receive free school meals but due to an error at the school, they did not have her down for free meals. She came home crying one day and told me the school only allowed her to have a cheese sandwich because they told her we owed money for her school meals. Any parent can imagine the heartache I felt when my child told me she was hungry because she didn't have money for her school meal. Fortunately, this was corrected and didn't happen again.

While a large percentage of Oregon schools currently offer free school meals thanks to the CEP program, there are still many who do not. We don't want any child to go

hungry or be ostracized over their lack of money for a school meal. This is why I support School Meals for All, and why Umpqua Valley Farm to School also supports School Meals for All.

Research and lived experience consistently show that when students have reliable access to nutritious food, schools see improved attendance, fewer disciplinary incidents, and stronger academic outcomes. SB 1581 is a smart investment in Oregon's students and our future.

With only a small number of schools remaining before Oregon becomes a Hunger-Free Schools state, I urge you to vote YES on SB 1581 and ensure that no child in Oregon goes hungry at school.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

Respectfully,

Erin Maidlow

Executive Director

Umpqua Valley Farm to School