

Submitter: Melina Barker
On Behalf Of:
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 Melina Barker , and I am the Director of the Oregon Farm to School Network, an organization of over 2,000 community members working in child nutrition, education and food production from all counties in our state. 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.

Offering nourishment free of charge to all students regardless of location is the first step in centering nutrition and health throughout the school day- something that the Farm to School movement is working tirelessly to support. No student should be hungry at school, and all students should experience meal time that supports well-being and nutrition.

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,

Melina Barker

Ashland, OR (statewide)

Oregon Farm to School Network