

Submitter:

Barbara Stevenson

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 Barbara Stevenson, and I live in North Bend, 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 being hungry and worrying about food. Hungry students cannot focus on learning.

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. It *is* possible to eat and learn at the same time.

The bill also reduces administrative burdens for schools by eliminating meal applications, income verification, and unpaid meal debt collection. Unpaid meal debt is awful – our children are being punished because their families cannot afford the small cost of meals at the school. I've eaten in elementary cafeterias and seen the brown bag lunches given to students with unpaid meal debt. They are unappealing and clearly different than the lunches other students are able to choose. As a parent, I was not allowed to pay the lunch debt of a student who was not my own. SB 1581 protects students from the stigma and meal shaming that comes from "free lunches" and unpaid meal debt, helping create school environments rooted in dignity, equity, and inclusion.

No matter a child's family's income, food should be available so that students are fed and able to concentrate on learning. SB 1581 will provide an environment where all are equal and able to focus on learning.

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,

Barbara Stevenson

North Bend, Oregon

Community member