



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

On behalf of the South Coast Health Equity Coalition (SCHEC), I am submitting testimony in strong support of **SB 1581: School Meals for All**.

SCHEC is a BIPOC and 2SLGBTQIA+-led Regional Health Equity Coalition serving Coos and Curry Counties. Our work is rooted in advancing health equity and addressing the social determinants of health—especially food security, economic stability, and the conditions young people need to thrive.

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

We are 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, housing instability, 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.

SB 1581 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.

This issue is not abstract for our coalition. It is personal, and it is widespread.

Many of our community members—including members of our own staff—have lived experience with food insecurity in childhood. As a student, there were times when I could not afford school lunch. I would run out of money and go hungry. I still remember what it felt like to be a child carrying the weight of something that should never have been mine to carry—**owing money to the lunch ladies**. That was one of my earliest relationships to debt: not credit cards, not student loans—**lunch debt**.

Hunger in school doesn't just affect a child's body—it affects their learning, their mental health, their sense of belonging, and their ability to trust the adults and systems meant to support them. It teaches children early that some kids get what they need, and others are expected to go without.

We believe Oregon can do better.

We often ask: what would a student's experience of school look like if they had the basic necessities guaranteed—consistent access to free, nutritious food every day without paperwork, without judgment, and without stigma? Universal school meals are not simply a programmatic change. They are a commitment to student well-being and educational equity.

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, we 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 your commitment to Oregon students.

Please feel free to contact me at **678-654-3164** or jayden@southcoastequity.org with any questions.

With deep respect and gratitude,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayden Ruff". The script is cursive and fluid.

Jayden Ruff (she/her)

Director, **South Coast Health Equity Coalition**