

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

My name is Everardo, and I live in Forest Grove, 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.

Personal Story and Testimony

In addition to being a community member, I serve as a Program Manager with Centro Cultural, where I help oversee one of the largest food pantries in the state. Through this work, I witness firsthand the growing number of families who are struggling to put food on the table. Each month, our food pantry continues to see an increase in visits, reflecting the rising cost of living and the widening gap between wages and basic needs.

When adults in our community are facing this level of food insecurity, it is inevitable that children are impacted as well. I see the effects of hunger and instability extend into our schools, where students are expected to learn, grow, and succeed while carrying the weight of unmet basic needs. When I was a student, I believed that issues like child hunger would have been resolved by now. Instead, we find ourselves in a situation that is, in many ways, worse than what families experienced in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Our children are the future of Oregon. They will become our next generation of skilled workers, healthcare professionals, educators, engineers, and leaders. If we want them to succeed, we must ensure they are given a fair and equitable chance to thrive. Universal school meals are a proven and effective way to support student well-being, academic success, and long-term outcomes.

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,

Everardo Lopez Pizano

Forest Grove / Cornelius

Community Member / Centro Cultural