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STATE SENATOR
DISTRICT 13



OREGON STATE SENATE
Testimony in Support of SB 1581

February 6, 2026

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB1581, with amendment. This bill expands free school meals to every public school in Oregon. As a classroom teacher for many years, I witnessed the impact of hunger on my students. The effects weren't only visible in fatigue and stress; I also remember high schoolers who would skip lunch to avoid the stigma of the free or reduced lunch line.

Over the past decade, there has been consistent forward movement in addressing inequities in school cafeterias and nutritional needs of Oregon's youngest learners. We have eliminated co-pays for school breakfast and lunch, and eliminated penalties for students based on meal debt. Here are some of the historic steps we have taken as a state:

- 2013 - HB2730 - Oregon adds breakfast to summer lunch program so students have access to meals outside the regular school year.
- 2017 - [HB3454](#) Oregon bans lunch shaming (alternative meal, hand stamp, etc) and ensures that any student who asks for a meal will receive one regardless of ability to pay. Boasts that 25% of foods served in school cafeterias are grown in the state thanks to farm to school programs.
- 2019 - HB3427 Student Success Act expands access to breakfast and lunch and established the Hunger Free Schools Account. About 60% of schools can now offer free meals.
- 2021 - HB2536 - Expanded Income Eligibility and universal no-charge meals for students in households with incomes up to 300% federal poverty guidelines. Improved state reimbursement to compensate schools for no-charge meals.
- 2020-2022 During COVID universal school meals were offered nationwide, providing proof of concept. We saw a significant increase in uptake among students who qualify for free and reduced lunch when ALL students have access to the same meal.
- 2023-2024 State budget investments for free and reduced school meals increased by \$17 million. These investments plus new federal community eligibility program participation opportunities expanded free meal access for tens of thousands of students across the state. 90% of schools now offer free meals.

- In 2026, Oregon can join MN, CO, CA, NM, MI, NY, ME, VT, MA by becoming the 10th state to ensure students can access nutrition at school.

Thanks to these policies, we have largely removed that stigma and created the opportunity for shared breakfasts and lunches, times for students to break bread together, build community, and fuel up for their days of academics. It is working. School meal access correlates with improved attendance rates and learning outcomes.

After years of effort, we are closer than ever to making universal school meals a reality. Today, Oregon is just 21 schools away from full participation, and a few of those are the schools in my Senate District. Hunger looks different in every community and in every family situation. Is rent going up again? Are there medical bills? Did a parent become unemployed? It is time for Oregon to take the final steps in our work toward becoming a Hunger Free Schools state.

Hunger and stigma do not disappear at a certain income level or stop at district boundaries. The fact that nearly every school and district in the state has implemented universal meals demonstrates the feasibility of this policy and its effectiveness. The districts who have universal meals have called it a game changer. The work at hand is finishing the job we started.

Investing in school meals is money well spent. Schools **buy food in bulk, they get commodity pricing** on numerous staples. They have staff that devote themselves to complying with strict nutritional standards for balanced meals. They can provide **good nutrition at a far cheaper price** than any of us can when we purchase food at retail price. For families that participate, school meals programs can save \$1400 per year, per child. Those dollars can go to groceries, rent, heating and cooling, and other basic necessities.

The policy with the -1 amendment does two things: It closes remaining gaps in our Hunger Free Schools efforts by ensuring that every child can access food at school regardless of their family income, and it adjusts the **reimbursement rate to schools to 100%** to ensure meal quality. The -1 amendment removes a provision that would have required additional FTEs at the Oregon Department of Education and makes minor technical language changes. We have one more technical fix amendment coming, as well.

We are in the midst of a hunger crisis. ODHS expects more than 313,000 people of the 740,000 enrolled in SNAP may be impacted by the H.R. 1 changes.¹ Health care premiums are skyrocketing. The cost of rent and groceries is also going up. In a time of such economic hardship, more people than ever are struggling. In our schools, serving our children directly, we can make a significant difference for Oregon's families.

¹<https://apps.oregon.gov/oregon-newsroom/OR/ODHS/Posts/Post/odhs-announces-federal-changes-to-snap-so-thousands-of-oreg>
onians-impacted-can-prepare?utm_source=chatgpt.com

While Congress has made decisions in H.R. 1 that negatively impact immigrant and refugee families, we can make a different choice to feed all kids who need a meal, across neighborhoods. With this bill we can ensure that families no longer have to fill out paperwork for their students to qualify for their child to participate in school nutrition programs. Every student deserves equal treatment in the cafeteria and deserves to eat without worrying about creating lunch debt for the family.

This bill dials in on one simple and powerful directive: feed students breakfast and lunch, no questions asked. We have been making gains for years and we are so close to achieving this goal.

School nutrition programs positively impact focus, health outcomes, mental health, chronic absenteeism, and sense of belonging. There is a considerable body of research that tells us that student hunger has negative impacts on learning outcomes, as well. We know that a budget is a statement of our values and this policy is an investment. Let's choose compassion and sound economics. This is an investment in our future.

I urge your support for SB 1581.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Courtney Neron Misslin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Courtney" and "Neron" on the first line and "Misslin" on the second line.

Senator Courtney Neron Misslin