

Support for SB 1581

School Meals for All



February 5, 2026

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

My name is Robin Roemer speaking on behalf of Oregon PTA representing thousands of families across the state. We urge your support for SB 1581.

Testimony in this committee has established that providing free school meals to all students is beneficial to students and their families, schools and districts. It reduces stress and stigma.

Students stay more focused and their brains fueled.

And, Cafeterias are classrooms too and School Meals for All makes them better ones.

School Meals for All allows schools to more easily provide and for students to more easily sample foods like kiwiberries and salad bars making them curious about options beyond Goldfish crackers. Cafeterias serving dishes like Sambusa and Pupusa teach all students new vocabulary and about different cultures, and show kids from Somalia to Mexico that they and their cultures belong in our schools.

More kids are showing up for lunch in middle and high school since it has become free. And it allows many kids to grab a tray even when they brought something from home - food not for themselves but for their friends who are struggling. Because they know that their friend - even after that one serving of pizza or three chicken tenders - is still hungry and they don't want them to be.

School Meals for All teaches our children that we can and should take care of one another. It teaches them compassion.

We need to do more to support our students experiencing poverty than this just bill can do, but a student's ZIP code should never determine whether a child has access to food or not. Hunger often is invisible and affects so many more families than those officially identified. Poverty exists even in districts we think of as affluent.

Breaking bread together is an essential part of the fabric of our society. Chatting over cheese tortellini, we deepen our understanding of the world and each other. Every child deserves these opportunities.

We need School Meals for All - not "almost all". And we need it now.