



March 16, 2021

House Committee on Education
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 2536

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chair Neron, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is to be a voice and force for the common good for all Oregon children, ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. OCO is the result of the merger between two historic Oregon non-profits: The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon and Children First For Oregon. We elevate data and lived experience to prioritize children and center communities. We continue to connect a community of 115 advocates, coalitions, and organizations through The Children's Agenda, a legislative agenda championing equitable state legislative policies and shared investments to improving the lives of Oregon's children and their families.

HB 2536 Strengthen Access to the School Meals Program is part of the 2021 Children's Agenda.

When kids are hunger-free, they focus and learn better in school, which sets the stage for them to excel in many other areas of life. Unfortunately, far too many kids in Oregon are not receiving the healthy start they need and deserve. Research shows how food insecurity can have a major impact on children's wellbeing. A 2017 systematic review found that even small levels of food insecurity were associated with academic and behavioral issues such as higher likelihood of repeating grades, lower reading and math performance, and higher rates of anxiety and depression in students.ⁱ

This problem that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data from the US Census Pulse Household Survey for Oregon (as of February 15, 2021) showed that almost 1 in 5 (19%) households with children responded that their children were either sometimes or often not eating enough because food was unaffordable.ⁱⁱ The pandemic has also revealed the disproportionate effects of food insecurity on marginalized communities. According to the same survey, Black, Hispanic, and mixed-race households in Oregon face over double the rates of food insecurity

The Children's Agenda

is a broad slate of equitable investments and policy solutions to meet the holistic needs of Oregon children, youth, and their families.



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than White households.ⁱⁱⁱ

Oregon has made great strides in the past several years to ensure that our students are well-nourished and prepared to learn, but we can do even better. In 2019, the Oregon Legislature passed the historic Student Success Act, which expanded access to nutritious meals at school for students facing food insecurity. This groundbreaking policy established Expanded Income Eligibility Guidelines (186-300% FPL) so that more students can receive needed meals at no charge. However, the current statute still leaves open the possibility for many children to go hungry at school. Since schools must opt in to the program, children's access to this benefit depends on where they live, contrary to the spirit of the policy.

HB 2536 would align the statute to its intended purpose by expanding income eligibility consistently and automatically to all schools statewide that fall within the criteria of the legislation. The bill is not intended to require schools to begin serving lunch who are not currently doing so. Instead, it will apply to schools that already participate in the National School Lunch Program. This is a simple, yet effective and equitable change that would ensure that the legislation has its intended effect on an estimated 484 schools and 38% of all K-12 students in Oregon.^{iv}

This technical fix has no anticipated fiscal impact as the intent was reflected in the Student Success Act budget, and it has broad support from Oregon's education and anti-hunger stakeholders. We strongly urge you to join us in supporting HB 2536.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Chis Coughlin, Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement Director
Peggy Ting, Policy Intern
Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

View the 2021 Children's Agenda at www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2021-childrens-agenda

ⁱ Shankar, Priya, Rainjade Chung, and Deborah A. Frank. "Association of food insecurity with children's behavioral, emotional, and academic outcomes: a systematic review." *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 38, no. 2 (2017): 135-150.

ⁱⁱ Data retrieved from Table 5, week 24 of the Census Household Pulse Survey (Feb 3 –15), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/hhp/hhp24.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Data retrieved from Table 2b, week 24 of the Census Household Pulse Survey (Feb 3 – 15), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp1.html>

^{iv} Based on 2019 ODE data