

February 26, 2019

House Committee on Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of HB 2760 and HB 2765. My name is Crystal FitzSimons, and I am the Director of School and Out-of-School Time Programs at the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC).

FRAC is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. For decades, FRAC has worked extensively with federal, state, and local government agencies, schools, private nonprofits, and other stakeholders to ensure that the child nutrition programs reach the children who need them. This has included improving and strengthening these critical programs through the passage and implementation of federal and state legislation. FRAC supports HB 2760 and HB 2765, two critically important pieces of legislation that will dramatically expand access to a healthy school breakfast and lunch so that students in Oregon are well nourished and are able to learn at the start of and throughout each school day.

Children sitting in a classroom hungry have a hard time focusing, concentrating, and learning. Offering free breakfast and lunch to all students gives students the nutrition that they need to learn throughout the school day. Oregon already has taken the important step of eliminating the reduced-price copay for school breakfast and lunch, allowing students whose household income is 185 percent of the federal poverty line or below to receive free school meals. But there are many students in Oregon who miss the cut-off for free school meals whose families are still struggling to make ends meet. When schools charge for meals, many of these children are costed out of school breakfast and lunch, and participation in free school meals can create stigma. HB 2760 would enable schools to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students, which will increase participation and allow more students to experience the educational and health benefits linked to eating school meals.

Offering free school breakfast and lunch also eliminates school meal debt. Schools can focus on providing the most nutritious and appealing meals possible instead of following up with families to collect school meals fees. Interactions can then focus on building a positive relationship between parents and guardians and the school administrators, teachers, and support staff.

HB 2765 offers an important opportunity to build upon the universal provisions in HB 2760 by dramatically increasing school breakfast participation. FRAC's *School Breakfast Scorecard* analyzed school breakfast participation nationally and in each state for the 2017-2018 school year. Oregon's school breakfast participation lags behind other states, reaching only 55 low-income students with school breakfast for every 100 who participated in school lunch. The report ranks Oregon 31st nationally among states and the District of Columbia. The report also finds that in states with the highest participation, offering free breakfast and implementing breakfast after the bell service models are the two most important strategies for increasing school breakfast participation.

Low participation in the School Breakfast Program is costly on many levels, with students missing out on the educational and health benefits associated with eating school breakfast, and states and school districts missing out on substantial federal funding. If Oregon had served even 70 percent of low-income students

for every 100 participating in school lunch, it would have received an additional \$9 million in federal funding in the 2017-2018 school year.

Too many students in Oregon miss breakfast at no fault of their own. Breakfast is often served in the cafeteria before the start of the school day, and bus routes and morning schedules do not always align with this timing. Unfortunately, students often feel stigma or shame about eating breakfast in the cafeteria before school, separated from their peers. Serving breakfast after the bell, as HB 2765 provides, ensures all students participate in the program and has proven to be the most successful strategy for increasing participation.

It is no surprise that many of the states with the strongest breakfast participation have passed legislation, including Nevada, New Mexico, and West Virginia. By requiring high-poverty schools to offer breakfast as part of the instructional day and providing additional state reimbursement for school districts to offer universal free meals to students, the state would be taking instrumental steps in addressing childhood hunger in Oregon.

I encourage the House Committee on Education to support both HB 2760 and HB 2765 so that more Oregon students can be ready to learn and succeed each school day.

Sincerely,

Crystal FitzSimons
Director of School and Out-of-School Time Programs