



**American  
Heart  
Association.**

February 9, 2026

Representative Estes, Chair  
House Committee on Education  
HB 2637- Proponent- In person/oral  
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On behalf of the American Heart Association, I respectfully submit testimony in support of HB 2637. This proposal requires local boards of education to consider eligibility for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP is a federally authorized, evidence-based program designed to ensure children have consistent access to nutritious meals at school. HB 2637 would ensure that deliberative consideration of CEP is being taken through increased transparency and accountability, while preserving local decision making.

CEP relies on objective federal eligibility criteria and includes built in accountability and oversight at the federal level. HB 2637 encourages and supports eligible school districts to opt into CEP while requiring reporting on participation. This approach provides opportunity. When school districts opt into CEP, they utilize federal funds through the existing National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to provide free breakfast and lunch to students. Participation allows districts to maximize federal reimbursements while reducing administrative costs.

Currently, Kansas is leaving considerable federal dollars on the table and students without reliable meal access. Encouraging opt in allows districts to act quickly and responsibly, based on their eligibility and operational readiness. CEP provides positive impact for students and families simplifying access by eliminating household meal applications and providing free meals to all students in eligible schools. This reduces stigma, increases participation, and improves attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes.

To illustrate the potential impact:

- If Wichita alone opted into CEP, thousands more children would gain access to free meals. However, hundreds more Kansas schools currently qualify for some level of federal reimbursement.
- Using existing federal funds ensures fiscal responsibility without state spending or any new state appropriation and reduces administrative burden.
- School districts are best positioned to determine whether CEP is appropriate based on student population, community poverty levels, and operational capacity. HB 2637 merely provides process transparency.

This approach ensures equitable access across urban, rural, and high poverty communities and avoids inconsistent or politicized decision making to address student hunger and works best when schools can act

promptly and locally. By removing barriers and promoting participation, the legislature can support student health, learning, and family stability while remaining fiscally responsible.

Sincerely,

Kari Rinker  
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American Heart Association