

Oral Opposition Testimony before the  
House Education Committee

On  
HB 2637

Requiring eligible boards of education to consider participation in the community eligibility provision, providing a financial hardship exception from such participation and requiring the state department of education to assist school district is seeking such participation.

by  
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to **House Bill 2637**. While United School Administrators appreciate the bill's intent to expand access to free school meals, we have significant concerns about local control, financial risk, administrative burden, and unintended consequences for school districts.

Local Decision-Making Should Not Be Mandated. Participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a complex financial and operational decision that varies widely by district. Requiring boards to formally consider CEP participation—regardless of local conditions it creates unnecessary mandates and pressures districts to justify decisions that should remain locally governed. School districts already evaluate CEP when it is financially viable. This bill risks substituting legislative direction for local fiscal expertise.

While CEP benefits many students, it can also shift unfunded costs to districts, especially when: federal reimbursement does not fully cover meal costs, Identified Student Percentage (ISP) declines over time, food, labor, and supply costs increase, or when districts face budget constraints in other essential services. A short-term participation decision can create long-term budgetary obligations that are difficult to reverse without community and family disruption.

Although HB 2637 includes a hardship exception, the bill does not clearly define eligibility criteria, documentation standards, or approval processes. Without clear statutory protections, districts could face political and legal pressure for declining participation even when financially justified.

The bill directs KSDE to assist districts, but it does not provide additional funding. For many districts, especially small and rural systems, this represents another unfunded mandate. School districts are currently struggling with special education underfunding, staffing shortages, transportation costs, and facility needs. Any policy that may increase operating costs must be carefully weighed against the risk of diverting funds from: classroom instruction, mental health services, student supports, and teacher recruitment and retention

USA Kansas strongly supports student nutrition and our members already utilize free and reduced-price meal programs to serve students in need. However, CEP participation should

remain voluntary, flexible, and fully based on local financial sustainability, not a legislative directive. We ask the committee reject HB 2637.