

Audrey Allen
February 12th, 2026
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Written-Only Proponent Testimony on HB 2637

Dear Chair Estes, Vice Chair McNorton, and members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2637. Ensuring all students have access to free school meals is essential for their ability to focus, learn, and succeed. Programs like the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) reduce barriers for families, allowing schools to dedicate more resources to supporting students rather than processing administrative paperwork.

As an educator, I see firsthand that many of our students do not receive adequate nutrition at home and rely on school meals as their primary source of food. Our staff even personally supplements food supplies for students through donated food bags for weekends and long breaks. Simply put, hungry children cannot learn.

I urge you to support HB 2637 to ensure our students have the nutritional foundation they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

Audrey Allen
Parent, Special Education Teacher
Wichita Public Schools

STATE OF KANSAS
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Chairwoman Estes and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2637 because this bill is not just about food, it is about smart governance.

We often talk about reducing bureaucracy, improving efficiency, and making sure public dollars are used wisely. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) does exactly that. By allowing eligible districts to offer universal free meals, we eliminate the costly and cumbersome process of collecting, verifying, and tracking individual free-and-reduced lunch applications. I understand the concern about reimbursement rates being lower than traditional applications, since this program is tied to Identified Student Percentage (ISP) counts and not actual poverty. There are many families who qualify but don't participate in SNAP, TANF, foster care, etc...which makes the ISP number artificially low. I would encourage the committee to take a look at trying to raise the ISP by improving automatic certification and matching systems to get a better gauge on that number. Some states use funds to make districts whole if CEP reimbursement falls short. I would be interested in seeing what those numbers would be and the return on investment for the state.

There are other benefits to CEP such as reducing the paperwork burden that falls on school staff who were not hired to be compliance officers. It also falls on families who must repeatedly disclose sensitive financial information. CEP streamlines this process and allows districts to use federal funds already available to Kansas schools more efficiently.

HB 2637 does something especially thoughtful: it nudges eligible districts toward participation while preserving local control. If a district can publicly demonstrate financial hardship, they may opt out. That balance, encouragement with transparency, is good policy design.

From a fiscal perspective, universal meals reduce unpaid meal debt, stabilize food service budgets, and allow districts to plan more predictably. From an operational perspective, it simplifies administration. From a community perspective, it removes stigma.

HB 2637 is not an unfunded mandate. It is an invitation to use an existing federal tool wisely...with accountability built in.

I urge you to support this bill not only as a child nutrition measure, but as a practical reform that respects taxpayers, educators, and families alike.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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I support HB 2637 because ensuring students have access to free school meals helps kids focus, learn, and succeed. Programs like CEP reduce barriers for families and allow schools to spend more time supporting students instead of processing paperwork.

As a mother of four boys in USD 232 and a registered dietitian, I recognize the value of school meals to ensuring that children can be fed, allowing them to be their best selves at least while at school. Currently, one in five Kansas children face food insecurity, so school meals really serve a critical role in making sure these kids get at least one good meal a day.

Further, as a Johnson County resident, I have been wondering why our Johnson County schools aren't taking part in the Community Eligibility Provision, as well as my alma mater, Republic County Schools. I see CEP as a tremendous opportunity to help make sure every child within a school is fed at school, as well as for families to have a bit more money to redirect to local economies. I'd appreciate knowing that school districts that I have a connection to have at least evaluated whether they qualify for CEP and some transparency about why they choose not to participate.

School meals play a critical role in the lives of all our children, not just those who are food insecure. Which is why I strongly support HB 2637 and urge you to support it as well. Thank you for considering my testimony.

USD 232 Parent

Kristine Kirk

February 09th, 2026

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Dear Chair Estes, Vice Chair McNorton, and members of the House Education Committee,

I support HB 2637 because ensuring students have access to free school meals helps kids focus, learn, and succeed. Programs like CEP reduce barriers for families and allow schools to spend more time supporting students instead of processing paperwork.

As a 30+ year educator, I have repeatedly seen how food insecurity affects students' ability to learn, socialize, and maintain self-esteem. Hunger creates barriers that no amount of instruction alone can overcome.

Students must have their basic needs met before learning can begin. When children are hungry, focus and engagement suffer, and the learning environment for everyone is disrupted. Providing meals helps eliminate the "food noise" that interferes with student success.

In USD 260, I have seen firsthand that students who receive meals are more alert, better prepared to learn, and less distracted. While some may argue this responsibility belongs solely to families, the unintended consequences of unmet needs impact entire classrooms.

I urge you to support this legislation. Providing free meals is a practical, compassionate step toward ensuring all Kansas students have a real opportunity to learn.

Kristine Kirk, SPED teacher

USD 260 but reside in USD 385

Ruchi Favreau
February 12, 2026
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Written-Only Proponent Testimony on HB 2637

Dear Chair Estes, Vice Chair McNorton, and members of the House Education Committee,

I respectfully submit testimony in support of HB 2637.

School meals are critical to a student's ability to attend school ready to learn. When students have consistent access to nutritious meals, schools see improved engagement, attendance, and overall student well-being. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is one option that can help support these outcomes when it aligns with a district's unique needs and financial realities.

HB 2637 strengthens transparency and awareness of CEP eligibility by requiring school boards to formally consider participation and to have access to technical guidance from the Kansas State Department of Education. At the same time, the bill recognizes that CEP may not be feasible for every eligible district and preserves local authority through a clear financial hardship exception. This balance is essential.

By encouraging informed, locally driven decision-making rather than mandates, HB 2637 helps districts prioritize students while maintaining fiscal responsibility and community trust. For these reasons, I encourage the committee to support HB 2637.

Respectfully,

Ruchi Favreau
Director of Nutritional Services
Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools

Dear Members of the Kansas House Education Committee,

My name is Clint Shipley, and I am a middle school principal with 18 years of administrative experience and 25 years in public education. I am writing in regards to HB 2637 and the goal of expanding access to free school breakfast and lunch for Kansas students, and in support of full federal funding to cover the additional costs to districts.

I am reminded of a family in our school community who fell into an income gap. Their increased earnings made them ineligible for assistance programs, yet not sufficient to reliably meet basic needs. No family should be forced to choose between the dignity of work and their children's access to nutritious meals. Universal school meals close this gap and provide stability for families working to stay afloat amid rising costs of living.

Historically, nearly 50% of students in our building qualified for free or reduced-price meals. This figure reflects a daily reality: food insecurity is a persistent barrier to learning. Students who are hungry struggle with focus, behavior, and attendance. Universal access to breakfast and lunch removes this barrier and allows schools to focus on teaching and learning.

Universal meals also eliminate stigma. Even in well-run systems, students know who qualifies and who does not. Universal access ensures dignity, equity, and full participation for all students.

While universal meals can increase participation and reduce administrative burden, districts cannot absorb these costs. When properly funded, universal school meals are not only a prudent investment in student well-being, academic readiness, and long-term outcomes but also an investment in working Kansas families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony and for your continued commitment to Kansas students and schools.

Respectfully,

Clint Shipley
Middle School Principal
Derby, Kansas