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Oral Testimony in Opposition to ~~26rs2581~~ SB 387  
Senate Committee on Government Efficiency

Chair Erickson, Ranking Member Holscher, and Members of the Senate Committee on Government Efficiency,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to 26rs2581. Kansas Appleseed strongly opposes this bill because it would create new barriers to school meals and would make it harder for schools to keep kids fed.

Kansas Appleseed has a long history of advocating for programs that reduce hunger and food insecurity in the Sunflower State. For more than a decade, we have championed child nutrition programs because making sure Kansas kids can eat at school is foundational to their lifelong success.

This bill would require additional income verification and limit schools' ability to use the Community Eligibility Provision. These changes add unnecessary paperwork and increase stigma for students. It shifts the focus away from education or nutrition support and toward bureaucracy.

According to the Kansas State Department of Education, nearly 198,000 (40%) students are enjoying free, nutritious meals this school year.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, 193 schools are participating in CEP in the 2025-26 school year, and over 60,000 Kansas students and their families are benefiting from this program.<sup>2</sup> Free meals ensure students are ready to learn, provide financial relief to working families, and reduce hunger in our communities.<sup>3</sup>

In our conversations with school nutrition professionals across the state, they have made it clear: school nutrition programs operate with full program integrity within existing parameters and federal regulations. Adding more verification is simply not a realistic expectation. It would add unnecessary and burdensome paperwork and administrative time for schools across the

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<sup>1</sup> Kansas State Department of Education. (2025). *Kansas K-12 Report Generator: Students Approved for Free- or Reduced-Price Lunches- Headcount Enrollment (Unaudited)*. KSDE Data Central. [https://datacentral.ksde.gov/report\\_gen.aspx](https://datacentral.ksde.gov/report_gen.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> Kansas State Department of Education. (2025). *Child Nutrition & Wellness Reports: Community Eligibility Participation Election*. KSDE Data Central. [https://datacentral.ksde.gov/nutrition\\_reports.aspx](https://datacentral.ksde.gov/nutrition_reports.aspx); Food Research & Action Center. (2025, June). *Community Eligibility: The Key to Hunger-Free Schools School Year 2024–2025*. FRAC. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/CEP-Report-2025.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *School Meal Statistics*. School Nutrition Association. (2025). <https://schoolnutrition.org/about-school-meals/school-meal-statistics/>

state. These activities cannot be covered using federal reimbursements, so the strain would hit school budgets as well.

Applications for free and reduced-price school meals include household and income information and are reviewed at intake and through USDA verification requirements. Districts must annually verify 3 percent of applications, or up to 3,000, and may verify additional applications for cause.<sup>4</sup>

School meals are one of the most important tools in the fight against childhood hunger and ensuring future student success. Participation in school meal programs is linked to improved health outcomes, better test scores, fewer school absences, and less behavioral referrals.<sup>5</sup> These programs are especially vital in Kansas, where 1 in 5 children do not know where their next meal is coming from. Students across the state are counting on consistent access to healthy meals at school. We should be working to protect and enhance this access, not put up more barriers.<sup>6</sup>

Decisions about how to feed students should be left to schools and communities, without redundant legislative intervention. School officials know their families and the kids who need meals. Kansas should be focused on protecting access to school meals and maximizing federal nutrition dollars that support our children and local economies.

I respectfully urge you to oppose this bill and protect school meals for Kansas students.

Thank you,

Haley Kottler

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<sup>4</sup> Kansas State Department of Education. (2025, April). *Chapter 8: Verification of Eligibility*. [cnw.ksde.org](https://cnw.ksde.org).  
<https://cnw.ksde.org/snp/food-service-facts/chapters/chapter-8-verification-of-eligibility>

<sup>5</sup> *School Meal Statistics*. School Nutrition Association. (2025).  
<https://schoolnutrition.org/about-school-meals/school-meal-statistics/>

<sup>6</sup> *Hunger in America: Kansas*. Feeding America. (n.d.).  
<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/kansas>