



**American
Heart
Association.**

January 23, 2026

Senator Renee Erickson, Chair
Senate Committee on Government Efficiency
CEP legislative approval- Opponent

On behalf of the American Heart Association, I respectfully request reconsideration of the proposal to require legislative approval for schools to apply for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Legislative approval would add unnecessary delay and bureaucracy to a federally authorized, evidence-based program designed to ensure children have consistent access to nutritious meals at school. CEP already relies on objective federal eligibility criteria and includes built in accountability and oversight. Adding a legislative approval requirement does not enhance fiscal responsibility or program integrity. Instead, it slows access to meals and introduces additional state level administrative costs without delivering improved oversight or savings.

Rather than creating barriers, a more effective approach is to encourage and support eligible school districts to opt into CEP while requiring reporting on participation. This approach would pivot from restriction to 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.

1. Allows for timely access to federal funds as school nutrition programs operate on fixed federal timelines. Legislative approval requirements can delay decisions beyond application windows, leaving 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.

2. 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, the number of Kansas children who have access to free meals through CEP would double.

That represents thousands of children gaining consistent access to meals, without creating new costs, mandates, or approvals.

3. Using existing federal funds ensures fiscal responsibility without state spending or any new state appropriation and reduces administrative burden.

4. School districts are best positioned to determine whether CEP is appropriate based on student population, community poverty levels, and operational capacity.

This approach ensures equitable access across urban, rural, and high poverty communities and avoids inconsistent or politicized decision making to addressing student hunger and works best when schools can act promptly and locally. Requiring legislative approval would unnecessarily delay access to meals, increase bureaucracy, and risk leaving federal dollars unused. 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