



KANSAS RURAL CENTER

FOR THE HEALTH OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

KANSAS RURAL CENTER

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January 23, 2026

To: Senate Committee on Governmental Efficiency, Chair Renee Erickson
Opponent Testimony on School Lunch Verification

Dear Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to this bill. The Kansas Rural Center has been working for 47 years to promote sustainable agriculture, land stewardship, and rural community resilience. Schools are the heart of rural communities, and access to high quality education is a key piece of making Kansas communities great. Making sure students have access to adequate, nutritious food is critically important for academic success. We are concerned that the additional bureaucratic requirements and limitations on accessing the Community Eligibility Provision will cut off valuable resources for families and communities across Kansas.

In addition to the general loss of resources that would occur with the passage of this bill, we are also concerned about broader ripple effects of this bill. For the past four years, we have helped to educate farmers across Kansas on how to sell products to their local schools. In that process, we learned that staffing was a critical barrier for many Kansas school districts to incorporate more local food purchasing. The additional bureaucratic requirements incorporated in this bill would further strain already over-extended school nutrition staff across Kansas. This additional bureaucratic work would reduce the ability of schools to buy from their local farmers. School food service can be a vital market for Kansas farms, especially in times of low commodity prices and cloudy international trade prospects. Access to reliable wholesale markets, like school food service, can be a pillar of local farm success which is key to thriving rural communities.

In addition to the concerns of my organization, I'll add my own personal view. When my children were younger, my family benefited from the Free and Reduced School meal program. When we had difficult, low-income years on the farm, it was comforting to know that my kids could get a school lunch. I want to make sure that the next generation of Kansas families have the same opportunity that we did.

Kansas should be focused on protecting access to school meals and maximizing federal nutrition dollars that support our children and local economies. The Kansas Rural Center respectfully urges you to oppose this bill and protect school meals for Kansas students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tom Buller
Executive Director
Kansas Rural Center