

Testimony to Senate Committee on Government Efficiency in Opposition to a Bill to Increase Household School Meal Application Verification

Alexis Bylander, Director of Child Nutrition Programs and Policy
January 23, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to a bill that would significantly hinder school meal programs across Kansas by increasing the number of household school meal applications required to be verified for the National School Lunch Program. We urge you to reject this proposal because it undermines proven strategies that reduce childhood hunger and imposes unnecessary administrative and financial burdens on Kansas schools.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. FRAC has worked for decades to improve and strengthen the federal School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs through federal and state legislation. We work extensively with federal, state, and local government agencies, schools, private nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders to ensure that the programs reach the children who need them.

Time and Money Spent on Verification Means Less Time on Meal Quality and Appeal

The current requirement that school districts verify three percent or up to 3,000 school meal applications with a focus on error prone applications each year necessitates significant administrative staff time. Any increase in the amount of applications or heightening of the process would further stretch limited administrative and school nutrition staff time for all school districts.

Funding for these activities comes directly from the federal reimbursement for school breakfasts and lunches that Congress provides school districts to operate the programs. Every dollar spent to verify school meal applications is a dollar diverted from the food and labor costs necessary to provide healthy meals to students. Schools across the country are working hard to provide healthy and appealing meals—this proposal would undermine these efforts.

Children Eligible for Free Meals Fall Through the Cracks of the Verification Process and Go Hungry

In addition to the significant administrative burden such a proposal would impose, research shows that the verification process inevitably causes eligible children to lose benefits. Increasing the number of verified applications will result in more eligible children losing access to school meals. The primary reason that children initially certified for free or reduced-price meals have their benefits terminated is failure to respond to the verification request, not that the families' income was shown to be inaccurate on the school meal application. Hungry children do not have the focus or energy they need to get the most out of the school day. They fall behind academically and have behavior issues that can disrupt learning for entire classrooms.

Strengthen Direct Certification to Support Integrity

School meal programs already operate with strong integrity. Data shows that integrity improves when administrative systems are modernized, not when paperwork is expanded. Real improvements to program integrity come from supporting LEAs in adopting the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), enhancing direct certification systems, and reducing unnecessary administrative barriers. These strategies ensure that eligible children receive the meals they need while safeguarding taxpayer resources and supporting efficient school operations.

We strongly oppose any bill that would significantly increase the administrative burden of operating the school meal programs, divert school nutrition program resources and staff time away from providing nutritious meals to students, and impede access to school meals for many vulnerable students. We urge you to oppose this bill.