

Jamie Mast, Parent

Written-Only Testimony in Opposition to Changes to Access to Free School Meals

Senate Committee on Government Efficiency

Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to Bill Number: 26rs2581. As a registered dietitian, lifelong Kansas resident, and mother of 4 boys in USD 232 De Soto, I am very concerned that the proposal set forth around changes to applying for free school meals will make it much more difficult to get access to free school meals for families who need such support.

School meals give students what they need to concentrate, learn, and be their best selves. In my experience as a mother and a person, hunger in one child does not just affect that one child – it can create disruptions for classmates, teachers, and school staff. Children simply cannot function effectively without a full stomach.

As I understand it, this bill would require additional income verification and limit schools' ability to use the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) by requiring additional legislative approval. I am concerned that this is an unnecessary extra step that will cost already budget-strapped schools more time and money. Schools already follow federal rules to determine eligibility for CEP and have been shown to be a very effective tool in making sure kids are fed while at school while also reducing stigma for students.

Finally, with the changes to SNAP that have come with the implementation of H.R. 1 (also known as One Big Beautiful Bill), school meals could serve as a last line of defense against hunger for some children. I hardly think this is the time to make things more difficult for those facing food insecurity by limiting access to free and reduced school 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 for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jamie Mast, Parent