



Written Testimony in Opposition to 26rs2581 (School Meals)

Chairwoman Erickson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to 26rs2581. This proposal would introduce unnecessary administrative barriers to well-established free and reduced-price school meal programs, negatively impacting students, school districts, and local food systems.

School districts in Douglas County including USD 497, USD 343, USD 491, and USD 348 already operate efficient meal programs that ensure students have access to nutritious food. The additional income verification requirements outlined in this proposal would impose significant new administrative burdens on districts that are already resource-constrained.

School meals are essential to student readiness, family stability, and hunger prevention. The proposed requirements would increase administrative costs for Douglas County schools by an estimated \$100,000 or more annually, necessitating multiple new full-time positions. Without additional funding, these costs would divert resources away from educational and student support services.

Furthermore, the proposal would reduce participation in school meal programs by increasing paperwork and stigma for families. As participation declines, school districts would have fewer resources to purchase food, resulting in reduced investment in local Kansas agriculture. For example, during the 2024–2025 school year, USD 497 allocated approximately 16 percent of its food budget—about \$500,000—to local farmers through established procurement agreements. These impacts would directly affect the economic stability of local producers.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to oppose 26rs2581. Protecting access to school meals is critical to student success, efficient school operations, and strong local economies.

Respectfully submitted,

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