

January 27th, 2026

Shelby Ostrom

Chair, Food and Farm Working Group

Douglas County Food Policy Council

Written-only, Opponent Testimony on ~~26rs2581~~ SB 387 (School Meals)

Senate Committee on Government Efficiency

Chairwoman Erickson and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to the following legislation: *Requires school districts to verify income eligibility for a student receiving free lunches and requires districts to seek legislative approval to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision.* The Douglas County Food Policy Council's Food and Farm working group is a collaboration of local organizations, leaders, and residents working to build the local food economy and ensure we maintain the needed natural resources for continued local agricultural production. We represent and support Douglas County's agricultural producers, food entrepreneurs, and food sector workers to help them thrive in our regional economy. We are deeply concerned that this proposal would create new barriers to the well established free and reduced meals programs. Our partners at USD 497, USD 343, USD 491, & USD 348 work hard to keep kids fed and don't need additional administrative burdens added to their already full workload.

School meals help students show up ready to learn, support working families, and are proven to reduce hunger. This bill would require additional income verification which will increase the district's administrative costs immensely. Without additional funding this takes away from other programs. These changes add unnecessary paperwork, increase stigma for students, and make it clear bureaucracy supersedes education. The Objectives and Policies in the Douglas County Food System Plan's Goal 1, which guide our working group, suggest actions that the community can progress to ensure that all thrive in the local food system and regional economy which include institutional purchasing of local food. This bill will result in less food going to our schools and less money going to local Kansas farmers, many of which have established programs with our local school districts. For example, in USD 497, about 16% (approximately \$500,000) of food expenditures in 2025 were to local farmers. There are ripple effects to these decisions, including the economic stability of our producers who rely on preexisting agreements.

Decisions about how to feed students should not require additional legislative approval. Our Kansas legislative system should be focused on protecting access to school meals and maximizing federal nutrition dollars that support our children and local economies. We respectfully urge you to oppose this bill and protect school meals for Kansas students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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