

January 27th, 2026
Emily Lysen & Jessica Cooney
Co-Chairs, Healthy Food For All Committee
LiveWell Douglas County
Written-only, Opponent Testimony on 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.* LiveWell Douglas County's Healthy Food For All committee is a working group of local organizations, leaders, and residents working to improve food access, health outcomes, and community well-being in Douglas County. 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 Douglas County's schools' administrative costs well over \$100,000/year as multiple positions will have to be added. 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. This bill will result in less food going to our schools, many of which have established programs with local farmers. For example, in the 2024-2025 school year in USD 497, about 16% (approximately \$500,000) of food expenditures were to local farmers. There are ripple effects to these decisions, including the economic stability of our producers who rely on preexisting agreements.

Currently Douglas County has 36.8% of eligible students participating in the free and reduced meal program. Douglas County's Community Health Improvement Plan explicitly states that increasing participation in free and reduced lunch is a priority strategy toward reducing the overall food insecurity rates in our communities. A rate which Feeding America indicates continues to rise. Communities like Eudora though have seen great success in their free breakfast programs, taking money from their already limited district budget to ensure any student can have breakfast if they need.

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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