



January 22, 2023

Minnesota House Education Finance and Policy Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Youakim and Members of the House Education Finance and Policy Committee:

The Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP) appreciates the opportunity to provide written public testimony in support of SF123 which provides no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students. LSAP is a statewide division of Legal Aid, providing policy advocacy on issues affecting low-wealth Minnesotans in legislative and administrative forums.

Legal Aid has engaged in healthy meal access advocacy for 15 years, including advocacy for expansions to free school breakfast and lunch. We have also pursued an end to lunch shaming practices with school districts, MDE, and the Minnesota Attorney General.

It has become increasingly clear to Legal Aid that many school lunchrooms are still not equipped to ensure that every child who lacks money for meals is always treated with dignity and offered the nutritious meal of the day. For years, we have implored school districts to follow anti-shaming and meal delivery practices that are quite simply in direct opposition to the business and financial operations they are asked to run by their district leadership.

The answer to this obstinate problem is to fund breakfast and lunch for all students: remove administrative complexities for school staff, eliminate the stigma that comes with an inability to pay, and guarantee a nutritious meal to every child.

We stay immersed in this work because 1 in 4 food-insecure children in Minnesota live in a household that is not eligible for free school meals, and hunger is a barrier to children's health and education. Universal free school meals are a textbook example of a policy practice that promotes income and race equity within a school, and it's a best practice that other states have now adopted.

We appreciate your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Webster", is positioned above the typed name.

Jessica L. Webster
Staff Attorney
Legal Services Advocacy Project