



Increasing Participation in the Community Eligibility Provision HF 1985/ SF 1902

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows high-poverty schools and school districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all student at no charge, reducing child hunger and making school meals more efficient. Currently, only half of the schools in the state that are eligible for CEP are participating. Minnesota ranks 47th out of 50 states in CEP participation. Ensuring all schools eligible for full funding are participating would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota to support school meals for all kids in high poverty schools.

How the Community Eligibility Provision Works

Schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed for school meals by the federal government based on the "identified student population" or ISP of those directly eligible for free meals without completing an individual application. Those identified are enrolled in programs like SNAP or TANF, or students that are experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or enrolled in Head Start.

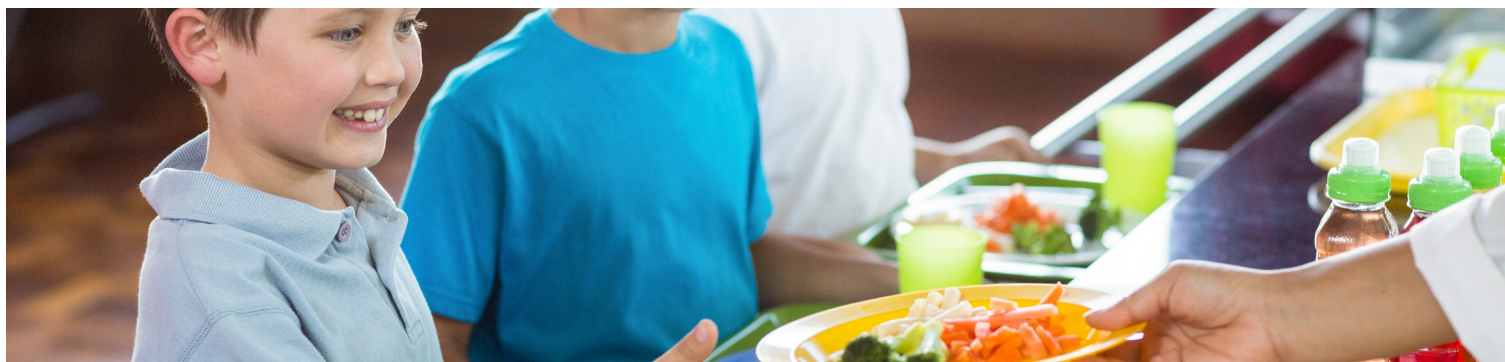
To be eligible for CEP, a school or school district must have a 40% or greater ISP. Schools with an ISP of 62.5% or over are fully reimbursed for 100% of meals served—meaning the federal government provides all the resources necessary to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

**Minnesota ranks 47th
in the nation in CEP participation**



Supporting HF 1985/ SF 1902 will:

- Require schools or school districts eligible for full federal reimbursement to participate (those with an ISP of 62.5% or higher)
- Support the Department of Education in providing technical assistance to schools with program enrollment and implementation
- Allow CEP schools the flexibility to use their Free and Reduced-Price enrollment from prior to becoming a CEP school for the full four years they are enrolled.



Endorsing partners include Allina Health, American Diabetes Association, Appetite for Change, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Children's Minnesota, Ed Allies, Education Minnesota, Every Meal, Food Research and Action Center, General Mills, Hunger Solutions Minnesota, MAZON, Minnesota Legal Aid, Minnesota School Social Workers Association, Second Harvest Heartland, Share our Strength, The Food Group, Twin Cities Medical Society and YouthPrise.

For more information contact Leah Gardner, lgardner@hungersolutions.org, 651-789-9850

March 25, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, I am writing to urge you to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

At Blue Cross we recognize that proper nutrition is fundamental to every aspect of our health and wellbeing. Access to healthy foods is linked to life-long health, learning and social outcomes. When children and young adults have access to healthy food, they have a better chance of developing lasting healthy nutrition habits that can reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases. These nutrition habits at an early age can reduce health disparities, contribute to more equitable health outcomes, and help make us a healthier state.

Adequate nutrition also plays a critical role in succeeding in school and academic achievement. Students who participate in school meals have improved attendance and academic achievement as well as decreased tardiness. Studies published in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, the International Journal of Food Science and Nutrition, and the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition show that academic achievement among students who eat school breakfasts tends to rise, especially in math.

Nutritious food is imperative for learning and should be available to all students. Unfortunately, one in six children in Minnesota currently face food insecurity, and one in nine Minnesotans do not know where their next meal will come from. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically increased food insecurity, particularly for BIPOC and low-income families. Such consequences should be unacceptable to us in a state that consistently ranks among the top producers of agricultural products in the US.

We cannot stand by as our neighbors, friends and family face the precarity of food insecurity, develop life-threatening and debilitating conditions brought on by chronic hunger, and feel shamed for their economic circumstances. It is imperative that we act to address food insecurity, and work to ensure that all youth have what they need to live a healthy life and succeed in school.

We urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Minnesota's children.

Signed,

Dr. Mark Steffen, MD, MPH



1300 Godward Street NE, Ste 2000, Minneapolis, MN 55413
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March, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Twin Cities Medical Society to express strong support for HF 1985, which would increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). The Twin Cities Medical Society is an organization that represents approximately 4,500 physicians and medical students living and working in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Our physician members are proud to support policies which reduce hunger.

Hunger has a deep impact on the health of our communities and our patients. Childhood food insecurity is particularly devastating and can have serious implications on children's physical and mental health. Research shows an association between food insecurity in children and chronic diseases like asthma and anemia, as well as several behavioral problems. Hunger also impacts several social determinants of health, including academic achievement and future economic prosperity, which in turn impacts health.

Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating—putting us 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity. Offering breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families in high-poverty schools and districts is an important step toward supporting the health of Minnesota children and addressing one of the many deep causes of health inequities in our state.

I urge you to support HF 1985. The bill would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota, ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children, and help set some of Minnesota's most vulnerable children up for a healthy future.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Traxler", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sarah Traxler, MD, MS, FACOG
President of the Twin Cities Medical Society



EVERY MEAL

FIGHTING CHILD HUNGER

March 18, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Every Meal (formerly The Sheridan Story), I am writing to urge you to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

School meals are the largest source of meals and nutrition for children facing food insecurity. Ensuring they have the nutrition they need to learn and grow is critical to allowing them to thrive academically, physically, behaviorally, and emotionally.

While free and reduced lunch pricing supports many children, it ignores the 1 in 4 kids in Minnesota who experience food insecurity that are in households that earn too much to qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

We must ignore these children no more by passing HF 1985, which will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating—putting us 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity.

We urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Minnesota's children.

Signed,

Rob Williams

Executive Director, Founder
Mobile: 612-237-7605
rwilliams@everymeal.org



Helping kids succeed in school and life for over 50 years!

MSSWA

MINNESOTA SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION



March 22, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives

Education Finance Committee

443 State Office Building

St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair, Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association (MSSWA), I am writing to urge you to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

As a school social worker, I know firsthand the need for students to be able to have access to nutritious meals every day. Families across our state are living with food insecurity, job insecurity and housing challenges; this pandemic has only exacerbated their situation. Our students, when they come to school hungry, are less able to access learning and be able to engage as students with their classmates and teachers. Having access to food takes away some of the stressors that weigh heavy on our student's lives every day. The other benefit is having an equitable food program decreases the stigma of needing meals at school and coming up short financially. Food for all our kids, just makes good sense for our state.

Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating—putting us 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity.

We urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Minnesota's children.

Signed,

Heather Alden, MSW, LICSW
Past-President MSSWA



March 22, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members:

On behalf of Second Harvest Heartland, I am writing to urge you to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

Currently, 1 in 6 Minnesota kids are food insecure, with Black and Latino families disproportionately impacted. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed a light on the crisis of hunger in our state and in our nation. However, we know that too many people in our state were struggling to meet their most basic of human needs – food – even before this pandemic. And kids have always been one of the groups most impacted.

School meals are a critical source of nutrition for many children, helping them learn and be active in the short term, and thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in the long term. School meals establish lifelong healthy eating habits that can reduce the onset and severity of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, along with the cost associated with these diseases. School meals can account for over half of a child's daily calories, supporting kids who might not otherwise have reliable access to healthy food at home.

CEP allows high-poverty schools and school districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge, reducing child hunger and making school meals more efficient. Expanding CEP participation not only increases school meal participation and ends lunch shaming, but will also reduce administrative burden, eliminate unpaid lunch debt, and maximize federal resources.

Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating—putting us 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity. We urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions in federal dollars to Minnesota and ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Minnesota's children.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allison O'Toole".

Allison O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer
Second Harvest Heartland

2HARVEST.ORG

651-484-5117 | 888-339-3663

7101 WINNETKA AVE. N., BROOKLYN PARK, MN 55428

MEMBER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**

March 22, 2021

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members:

I am writing in support of HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families. I encourage the Committee to hold hearings on this legislation and to support passage of the bill.

I serve on the national board of directors of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. I represent MAZON in the Minnesota Partners to End Hunger Coalition. In our state, we have been particularly active in support of expanding access to school feeding programs. We supported legislation in 2014 for state funding to provide free school lunches to students who otherwise would only qualify for reduced price lunches. We also continue to actively support legislation to put an end to school lunch shaming.

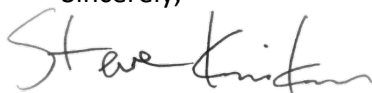
One of the lessons we've learned during the COVID pandemic is how vulnerable many families are to economic disruptions. However, we know that too many people in our state were struggling to meet their most basic of human needs – food – even before this pandemic. School meals are a critical source of nutrition for many children, helping them learn and be active in the short term, and thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in the long term.

As a state, we ought to support policies that expand access to school meals for as many vulnerable students as is feasible. HF 1985 achieves that goal by requiring schools to take advantage of the Community Eligibility Provision. Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating. That puts us at 47th out of 50 states on acceptance of this opportunity.

HF 1985 would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure that 50 more schools will be able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children. The bill deserves the Committee's support, and I encourage you to schedule hearings and move forward with passage.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Minnesota's children.

Sincerely,



Steven Krikava
Edina, MN

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* Titles for identification purposes only
^o Past Chair



March 25, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Share Our Strength, I am writing to urge you to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

No Kid Hungry Minnesota is a campaign of Share Our Strength, a national anti-hunger organization dedicated to ending hunger and poverty. Using proven, practical strategies, our No Kid Hungry campaign builds public-private partnerships with the goal of ensuring children have access to the healthy food they need, every day. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, No Kid Hungry has provided emergency grants across all 50 states, including nearly \$850,000 in Minnesota, to help school districts, food banks and other community organizations feed kids during this crisis. In addition to our grant-making, we have advocated for policies to address the unique barriers and unprecedented level of need brought on by this crisis. Due to the pandemic, it is estimated that in Minnesota 1 in 5 kids were projected to face hunger in 2020.

The No Kid Hungry campaign is a strong proponent of CEP. CEP is a critical tool in the fight against child hunger. CEP promotes equity by eliminating the out-of-pocket costs for families and by reducing stigma for students. Furthermore, a study published in the [Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition](#)¹ finds significant benefits for students attending CEP schools, including higher attendance rates and more students advancing beyond 10th grade.

During times of uncertainty, as it has during the pandemic, CEP can also support school nutrition departments as they identify alternative ways to feed students. CEP streamlines school meals operations and makes it easier to implement meals in the classroom. Under CEP, school nutrition staff no longer have to distribute, collect, and analyze school meals applications, which significantly reduces administrative burden. The program also eliminates any concerns of unpaid school meal debt, helping many families facing lost jobs, reduced wages, or other challenges.

¹<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/MHKXYFP3X8UHDQKJBAIB/full?target=10.1080%2F19320248.2019.1679318&>



Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating—ranking the state 47th out of 50 in the United States.

Share Our Strength urges your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Minnesota's children.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bernadette Downey", is shown on a light blue background.

Bernadette Downey
Associate Director, Government Relations and Advocacy
Share Our Strength



March 25, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Members of the Committee,

The Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP) appreciates the opportunity to provide written public testimony in support of HF1985 to increase Minnesota students' participation in the Community Eligibility Provision. LSAP is a statewide division of Legal Aid, providing policy advocacy on issues affecting low-wealth Minnesotans, children, seniors, and Minnesotans with disabilities in legislative and administrative forums.

Legal Aid has been engaged in healthy meal access advocacy for 14 years. We have advocated for expansions of free school lunch and breakfast and an end to lunch shaming policies and practices.

Legal Aid was thrilled with the creation of the federal Community Eligibility Provision to allow high poverty schools and districts to offer free breakfast and free lunch to every student in a participating school. CEP is an extraordinary anti-hunger tool and a textbook example of a strong policy practice that promotes income and race equity within a school. CEP ensures access to nutritious meals while removing pressure and stigma from children who are at risk of missing meals.

Yet, Minnesota schools were reluctant to enroll. Only half of CEP eligible schools in Minnesota are participating – placing Minnesota 47th out of 50 states to embrace this important opportunity. Minnesota is forgoing millions of additional federal resources for nutritious meals for more than 5,000 Minnesota kids.

It's not too late. Minnesota can embrace this opportunity and enroll every eligible school in Community Eligibility Provision for the benefit of thousands of children.

We appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "dth", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Staff Attorney, Legal Services Advocacy Project

March 24, 2021

Representative Jim Davnie, Chair
Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Allina Health, I am writing in support of HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

Allina Health is committed to working in partnership to ensure all people in our communities have equitable access to healthy food and to live healthy lives. Our Accountable Health Communities (AHC) demonstration project screens patients who are Medicare, Medicaid, and dual-eligible beneficiaries for health-related social needs such as housing instability, cost of utilities, food insecurity, interpersonal violence and transportation. Data gathered from this project revealed 1 out of every 3 patients screened listed food insecurity as their highest need.

Access to nutritious food is a key social determinant of the health of children and adults alike. Nutritious food is essential for proper growth and development in children. We must take action to ensure our children do not suffer the serious mental and physical effects of hunger.

Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota eligible for CEP are participating—putting Minnesota 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity. We urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure more than 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children.

Sincerely,



Kristen McHenry
Director, Government Relations
Allina Health

March 24, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Food Research & Action Center, the leading national nonprofit organization working to eradicate poverty-related hunger and undernutrition in the United States, we urge you to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Community eligibility is a powerful tool for high-poverty schools to provide breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students. It reduces administrative paperwork for schools so they can focus on providing healthy meals to help students learn and thrive; increases school meal participation by removing the cost barrier and stigma; maximizes federal reimbursements; and makes it easier to implement innovative service models like Breakfast in the Classroom. Community eligibility is a win for everyone — students, families, and schools.

The benefits of the Community Eligibility Provision are numerous.

- Offering meals at no charge to all students increases participation among all students, allowing all students to experience the education and health benefits linked to participating in school meals.
- School nutrition staff do not need to collect fees from students who are eligible for reduced-price or paid school meals, allowing students to move through the cafeteria line faster, and ensuring that more children can be served.
- Schools no longer have to deal with unpaid school meal debt for reduced-price and paid students.

Despite all of the benefits that CEP offers, [according to one of our recent reports](#), only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are currently participating, putting Minnesota 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity. If all CEP eligible schools in MN participated, the state could draw down an additional \$4,515,135 annually in federal reimbursements.

The current pandemic has highlighted the critical role that school meals play for children, particularly those from low-income households. HF 1985 would allow high-poverty schools and districts in Minnesota to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families. We urge your support for HF 1985 to support students, families and schools in Minnesota.



1200 18th Street, NW | Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Luis Guardia'.

Luis Guardia
President
Food Research & Action Center

March 24, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

I am writing to urge you to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

As a past president of the Minnesota and national School Nutrition Associations and former Nutrition Services Director and Chief Operations Officer for Saint Paul Public Schools, I witnessed first-hand the benefits of CEP to students, families, and districts. Meal participation grows as stigma is reduced, and districts benefit by reduced administrative effort and an increase in federal reimbursements.

In my current role as Senior Consultant, ProTeam Foodservice Advisors, I work with districts across the country. I frequently advocate for the use of CEP as a strategy to benefit participants and districts. Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating—putting us 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity.

As a Minnesota resident and child nutrition program advocate, I urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure more schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to all children.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical matter.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jean Ronnei".

Jean Ronnei, SNS

Jean Ronnei
727 Crescent Curve
Saint Paul, MN 55127
(651) 262-4807



✉ Info@youthprise.org ☎ 612 564 4858

March 25, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Youthprise, I am writing to urge you to **support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)** of the school meals program. This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating—putting us 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity. This means Minnesota is leaving valuable federal resources on the table at a time when 1 in 6 children are food insecure, with Black and Latinx families disproportionately impacted.

Back in 2014, Youthprise saw a similar issue with federal resources going untapped to help pay for meals and snacks during out-of-school time programming. Five years later, Youthprise's Nutrition Hub served over 1 million meals in 2020 alone through those funds to respond to unprecedented need during the pandemic. Youthprise has seen firsthand the systems-changing power of untapped federal money and believes HF 1985 presents an opportunity for Minnesota to do it again, which is why we are proud to be part of the Healthy & Hunger Free Schools campaign.

We also know that 1 in 4 Minnesota youth who experience food insecurity are in households that earn too much to qualify for free or reduced-price meals. HF 1985 will help close this gap in our current school meals system, which is important given the strong connection between proper nutrition and academic achievement, health, and wellbeing. For these reasons, Youthprise included increasing participation in CEP as part of our *New Generation of Equity* policy agenda to help achieve our mission of increasing equity with and for Minnesota's indigenous, low-income, and racially diverse youth.

We ask your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 students.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Minnesota's youth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wokie Weah', with a stylized, cursive script.

Wokie Weah
President



March 25, 2021

Chair Davnie

443 State Office Building

St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Support for HF1985

Dear Chair Davnie and members of the Committee,

I am writing to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to schools or families.

Just over a year ago, our country and our state faced a pandemic that disrupted life and schooling for everyone. We made a collective choice at that point to provide meals to all students who needed them regardless of their family's income, no questions asked. CEP is a visionary program that works in that same spirit: feeding all students simply because it is the right thing to do.

Unfortunately, Minnesota is nearly last in the country for usage of CEP and less than half of CEP-eligible schools are taking advantage of the federal funds available to feed all of their students. The primary barrier tends to be concerns around losing out on compensatory revenue if a school takes up CEP, however HF1985 provides stability by allowing CEP schools to lock in their free and reduced price meal counts for the purpose of compensatory revenue for the duration of the four year CEP cycle, reducing the administrative burden. That would mean schools would no longer need to choose between feeding all of their students and receiving their fair share of dollars to support the academic development of students experiencing poverty.

This bill creates conditions for schools who qualify to be reimbursed at the "free" rate from the federal government to take advantage of the program and its benefits to all students. According to research published by the Brookings Institute in 2021, CEP schools raised achievement and decreased suspensions for students who would not have otherwise had access to subsidized meals.¹

We urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of dollars in additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children. Thank you to Rep. Jordan for your leadership on this issue and to the committee for your commitment to Minnesota's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Shaver", written in a cursive style.

Matt Shaver, Policy Director

¹<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/02/11/schoolwide-free-meal-programs-fuel-better-classroom-outcomes-for-students/>

March 25, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hunger Solutions Minnesota, I am writing to urge you to support HF 1985 to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to the schools or families.

In these times of uncertainty and economic hardship, schools remain a critical access point for families in need of food. Unfortunately, 1 in 6 children in Minnesota are currently experiencing food insecurity. Furthermore, over 1 in 4 food insecure children live in households that do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

We need to ensure that students can access the food they need, when they need it—and focus on learning, not hunger.

We urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure more schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to all children.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical matter.

Signed,



Colleen Moriarty
Executive Director
Hunger Solutions Minnesota
cmoriarty@hungersolutions.org
651-789-9841

March 25, 2021

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Darnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Children's Minnesota, I am writing in support of HF 1985 which aims to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This will allow high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost to schools or families.

Children's Minnesota is the state's largest pediatric health care system. We serve an incredibly diverse patient population and more than 45 percent of our patients are insured through Medicaid. Because of the diversity of patients we see, we know the unique and varied challenges Minnesota children face. Many lack the basic supports they need to thrive, such as safe and stable housing, access to high quality childcare and adequate access to healthy food.

Proper nutrition is fundamental to every aspect of a child's health and wellbeing. Today, because of the economic crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic, one in six children in Minnesota face food insecurity. Missing meals and experiencing hunger can impair a child's development and academic achievement. Studies have shown that children who experience food insecurity are more likely to struggle in school, have increased absenteeism and experience behavioral and mental health problems like anxiety and depression. Minnesota's children have been through a year unlike any other and many challenges lie ahead. We need to ensure that students can access the food they need, when they need it so they can focus on learning, not hunger. We can do this by making sure they have access to free breakfast and lunch in school.

Currently only half of the schools in Minnesota that are eligible for CEP are participating—putting us 47th out of 50 states on uptake of this opportunity.

We urge your support for HF 1985 which would bring millions of additional federal resources to Minnesota and ensure over 50 schools are able to provide free breakfast and lunch to over 5,000 children. We look forward to continuing to partner with you in efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of kids in our state.

Sincerely,



Maria Christu
Senior Vice President, Advocacy & Health Policy
Chief Legal Officer
Children's Minnesota



2021 Position Paper

School nutrition professionals mobilized immediately when the [pandemic](#) closed school doors nationwide, and despite challenges, they continue to ensure student access to healthy school meals. Through the extension of [federal waivers](#), school breakfast, lunch, summer meals and afterschool meals have offered a lifeline for families struggling with economic uncertainty or the challenges of balancing work and distance learning. These programs, [proven](#) to fuel student success and combat child hunger and obesity, will be critical to our nation's recovery. *To support the health and achievement of America's students and ensure the financial sustainability of school meal programs, the non-profit School Nutrition Association (SNA) calls on Congress to:*

Permanently expand the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to offer all students meals at no charge as an integral part of the educational experience. Universal meals will:

- Provide all students equal access to school breakfast and lunch and eliminate any stigma or barriers for students to benefit from these meals. Nutritious school meals are [proven](#) to support learning, improve attendance and classroom behavior and contribute to overall health and wellness.
- Ensure no child goes hungry during the school day or accrues [unpaid meal debt](#), a burden on families and school district budgets.
- Eliminate the costly, time-consuming meal application and verification process, and streamline paperwork and reporting requirements. Parents won't have to worry about complicated meal applications, and school nutrition professionals can focus on nourishing students. [Learn more.](#)

Provide emergency financial relief directly to School Food Authorities (SFAs). COVID-19 school closures and the higher costs of serving meals during the pandemic have crippled school meal program budgets. A recent SNA [survey](#) revealed extensive financial losses, with a harrowing 62% of school nutrition directors anticipating a loss for School Year 2020/21, and an additional 28% of respondents unsure of what to expect. Meal program losses will cut into education budgets, impeding efforts to meet the needs of students and jeopardizing progress in school nutrition programs. While emergency funds provided in the December 2020 stimulus bill will help offset some of the losses accrued last school year, these funds are insufficient to ensure the financial sustainability of school meal programs moving forward. [Learn more.](#)

Preserve USDA Foods entitlements and State Administrative Expense (SAE) funds, impacted by COVID-19. School meal programs depend heavily on USDA Foods to reduce meal costs and offer students a wide range of U.S. grown foods. USDA Foods entitlements and SAE funds are based on school meal participation data. With participation drastically down due to COVID-19 school closures, Congress should direct USDA to utilize Fiscal Year 2019 participation data when calculating future entitlement and SAE fund values. [Learn more.](#)

Reduce regulatory and administrative burdens. Overly complex federal regulations divert resources from the mission of serving students. They also impede efforts to quickly and creatively respond to student needs in times of emergency. Congress should direct USDA to implement the recommendations of the congressionally-mandated [Child Nutrition Reporting Burden Analysis Study](#). Preserving flexibility on [whole grain, sodium and milk regulations](#) will continue to ease menu planning and procurement challenges. [Learn more.](#)