

June 16, 2020

LOCAL 284



**SERVICE
EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL
UNION**

Imagine...

Students in every Minnesota school having all that they need to succeed, from pre-k to career;

A community that recognizes our contribution to education by providing good working conditions and fair wages to all staff;

An economy that fairly rewards everyone's hard work and enables all families to enjoy a good quality of life through their work and retirement years;

A Union of members powerful enough to make it happen!

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Rep. Cheryl Youakim
591 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Student Meal Debt Shaming

Chair Youakim:

Thank you for hearing House File 18, the bill to prohibit student meal debt shaming practices and House File 36, which contains meal debt shaming provisions. As you know, SEIU Local 284 represents more than eight thousand education workers across Minnesota. Workers include professors, clerical staff, paraeducators, nutritional services workers, building and grounds workers, early learning staff, custodians and bus drivers. Our mission is to improve the lives of working people and their families and lead the way to a more just and humane society. A critical component of that mission is to end student meal debt shaming.

As an organization representing nutritional service workers we have always known that adequate nutrition is one of the most important factors influencing student growth and academic success. The COVID-19 crisis has made it even more clear that school nutrition programs and food service employees are critical to student health and wellbeing. Children behave and learn better when they're well nourished.

Ensuring that every student can access school nutrition programs, regardless of their parents' ability to pay, is critical to ensuring student success. The changes in these bills are a positive step to protect students against meal debt shaming. Our food service members are the ones who are asked to deny students meals and our clerical members are the ones who have to inform students that they will not be allowed to walk at graduation or participate in afterschool programs because of an outstanding meal balance. As difficult as those conversations are for our members the negative impact on students is much greater. Everyone at 284 is grateful for your work to prohibit meal debt shaming practices so that students are not stigmatized and so that our members can focus on what they're good at; caring for the kids and keeping the school running.

Thank you for your work on these important bills.

Sincerely,

Kelly Gibbons
Executive Director
SEIU Local 284