



March 24, 2026

Chair Joseph M. McNamara  
House Education Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly

RE: In Support of H8129, Ending Transaction Fees for School Meals

Dear Chair McNamara,

As the CEO of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, I write in strong support of Representative Caldwell's bill (H8129) to eliminate transaction fees for school meals.

At the Food Bank, every day we see children going hungry. Every month more and more individuals and families with children seek food assistance from our network of 137 member agencies. In fact, nearly one-third of households going to local food pantries are families with children.

School meals are one of the most powerful tools to reduce child food insecurity. When parents are already struggling to meet their families' most basic needs, school meals are a lifeline. Paying for those meals shouldn't include a fee which forces a parent to choose between another meal for their child, or paying a fee. All too often, we are hearing that parents are telling their children not to eat if they "owe money" or skip school meals entirely. These fees are the difference between children eating a full meal or going through the school day hungry.

When children go hungry, they aren't able to focus on school work, get sick more often, face development and behavioral challenges and simply can't be kids.

Representative Caldwell's bill to outlaw school lunch transaction fees is necessary; it's straightforward, and an evidence-based poverty and hunger intervention. Not only is it a tool to end childhood hunger, but will alleviate pressure on a strained household and improve the food security of their entire family.

I urge you to pass this legislation. Ending lunch fees is a concrete, achievable step toward reducing food insecurity. Thank you for your continued partnership in this effort.

Sincerely,

Melissa Cherney, CEO

RI Community Food Bank