




RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT AFL-CIO

To: House Finance Committee
From: Frank Flynn 
Date: March 7, 2024
RE: Testimony in **Support of H 7400 (Caldwell, et al.)**
Universal School Breakfast and Lunch

On behalf of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals we strongly support House Bill 7400 sponsored by Representative Caldwell. This bill would require all Rhode Island schools to make breakfasts and lunches available to all students free of charge.

It is our belief that a healthy, well-balanced diet is a fundamental element of student success. We also believe that student hunger contributes to student absenteeism, poor academic performance, social and emotional stress, and disruptive behavior. It is our contention that food insecurity and improper nutrition exists across the entire economic spectrum and is not limited to students living in poverty.

Requiring districts to make breakfast and lunch available to all students during the school day will be beneficial for many reasons. First, all school meals would be subject to USDA health and nutrition standards. Second, this would eliminate the stigma sometimes attached to children receiving free and reduced lunches. Additionally, this would eliminate the "lunch shaming" which sometimes occurs when a child is unable to pay for their meal. This would also ensure that students have access to at least two healthy meals every day that school is in session. Finally, this would assist in fighting the nationwide epidemic of childhood obesity.

This bill also includes a number of provisions to strengthen the implementation of the bill. At the school level it requires a minimum of twenty minutes for students to be able to consume their lunches. It directs the food service provider to work with the school's health and wellness subcommittee to assist in meal planning to ensure choices which are not only healthy but culturally relevant. It also encourages the sourcing of locally grown or produced food items. This would require districts to maximize access to federal funds by participating in a number of options available. The bill would appropriate funding for a full-time employee at the R. I. Department of Education to oversee the administration and implementation of this program.

Thank you for your consideration.

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