



Rhode Island Department of Human Services
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March 7, 2024

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H7225 – An Act Making Appropriations for the Support of the State for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025 – Article 8 Section 2

Dear Chair Abney:

I am writing to express Department of Human Services support (DHS) regarding Article 8 Section 2 relating to the Governor's proposed FY25 Budget, which would make school lunch free for children currently eligible for reduced priced meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

Reducing food insecurity is a top priority for DHS, and this important initiative aligns with DHS's proposed SNAP Summer EBT initiative. Article 8 Section 2 and the Summer EBT initiative will ensure children with the greatest need have access to healthy, nutritious meals *all year long*. The benefits of supporting these programs clearly show such an investment can be met with tremendous reward for some of the state's most vulnerable. With a total \$0.8 million investment for Summer EBT in FY25, it is estimated that will help realize \$10.2 million in federal funds for needy children.

Most importantly, providing students with access to nutritious meals during the school day has been shown to improve health outcomes and educational performance, top priorities for the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). Through the Governor's recommended budget, DHS and RIDE will have more resources to combat food insecurity and improve educational outcomes, helping ensure Rhode Island children are able to thrive regardless of their socioeconomic status.

DHS is proud to support Governor McKee's important initiative. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito".

Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director
RI Department of Human Services

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance
Christopher O'Brien, Committee Clerk
Sharon Reynolds Ferland, House Fiscal Advisor
Joseph Codega Jr. State Budget Officer