

April 29, 2025

The Honorable Marvin Abney, Chair
House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903

SUBJECT: Support for House Bill 5742

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

As a Rhode Island resident, parent, and food system fan I respectfully request that you support and fund House Bill 5742, AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- FEDERAL AID, by Rep. Caldwell. This important proposal would establish a Healthy School Meals for All program in Rhode Island public schools phased in over 3 years, starting with elementary schools, followed by middle schools and high schools. Healthy School Meals for All means offering breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost, regardless of household income, so they can learn and thrive.

I have worked in food systems almost all of my life, starting as an ice cream scooper at 15 years old and most recently for an organization that supports child nutrition and food access. Because of federal funding cuts, our school meal programs are about to be hit with unfathomable challenges and students and families will feel these negative consequences.

But strengthening our school meal programs and expanding access to all students brings incredible opportunity for our state, even beyond making sure kids have enough nutrition to stay focused and learn. Strong school meal programs support their long term academic success and long term health, and when paired with farm to school programs bring fresh foods to our students and diversified income to local farming and food businesses. RI has a thriving and supportive local food economy, but this Healthy School Meals for All Bill is *essential* in making sure more residents get to enjoy our wonderful local offerings. It is also a critical step in making RI's food system more resilient and sustainable.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caitlin Mandel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caitlin Mandel
Barrington, RI

