



To: House Finance Committee  
From: Karen Malcolm, Protect Our Healthcare Coalition, [ProtectRIHealth@gmail.com](mailto:ProtectRIHealth@gmail.com)  
Date: April 29, 2025  
Re: **SUPPORT House Bill 5742 – Healthy School Meals for All**

The Protect Our HealthCare Coalition is a group of leading Rhode Island non-profits and consumer groups with a shared mission to protect, improve, and expand equitable access to quality, person-centered, affordable health care for all.

We strongly **support House Bill 5742** because **we are deeply concerned about the persisting issue of food insecurity in Rhode Island, which is a critical social determinant of health**. According to the RI Life Index, the level of food insecurity remains alarmingly high, with 38% of households with children reporting that they cannot afford adequate food.<sup>1</sup> It's crucial to note that not all of these households qualify for free school meals under federal guidelines. This pressing issue needs immediate attention, as children should be focusing on their next math quiz, not worrying about their next meal.

Inadequate nutrition has a significant impact on a child's health, educational achievement, and economic well-being. It not only leads to chronic disease and emotional distress but also hampers their ability to move out of poverty and improve the prospects of future generations.<sup>2</sup>

By ensuring that all Rhode Island children have access to consistent nutrition, this legislation will be a major step forward in eliminating health and education inequities, safeguarding against chronic food insecurity, and paving the way for a healthier and more prosperous future for all Rhode Islanders.

Healthy children mean a healthier future for all of Rhode Island. We urge the Committee's support for health school meals for all children.

Thank you.

**Protect Our Healthcare Coalition partners include:** Economic Progress Institute, RIPIN, Mental Health Association RI, RI Health Center Association, Latino Policy Institute, Central Providence Opportunities: A Health Equity Zone (CPO-HEZ), United Way of Rhode Island, Senior Agenda Coalition RI, RI Medical Society, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, SEIU Rhode Island Council, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Leukemia/Lymphoma Society, RI Coalition for the Homeless, Rhode Island Working Families Party, Mental Health Recovery Coalition, RI Community Food Bank, RI Psychological Association, Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council, Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, HousingWorksRI, Rhode Island Organizing Project (RIOP), National Association of Social Workers RI Chapter, The Womxn Project, Advocates for Better Care

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rilifeindex.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4785470/>