



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

To: House Finance Committee
From: Maribeth Calabro, President *Maribeth K Calabro*
Date: April 29, 2025
Re: **Healthy School Meals for All**
Testimony in **support** of H 5742 (Representative Caldwell, et. al.)

Dear Members of the Rhode Island House Committee on Finance,

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) strongly supports House Bill 5742, "Healthy School Meals for All." As educators and advocates for the well-being of our students, we recognize the profound impact that access to nutritious meals has on their ability to learn and thrive. Our support is firmly rooted in Rhode Island Kids Count data and extensive national research that underscores the critical importance of healthy breakfast and lunch for school-aged children.

Rhode Island Kids Count consistently highlights the significant challenges that many families in our state face in providing adequate and nutritious food for their children. Their data reveals concerning levels of food insecurity, a reality that directly impacts students' readiness to learn. When children come to school hungry, their focus is compromised, their energy levels are low, and their capacity to engage in classroom activities is significantly diminished. By ensuring universal access to healthy school meals, House Bill 5742 offers a vital support system, leveling the playing field and ensuring that all students have the fundamental nutrition necessary to succeed academically.

Decades of national research corroborate the undeniable link between healthy meals and positive educational outcomes. Studies have consistently demonstrated that students who regularly consume nutritious breakfasts and lunches exhibit enhanced concentration, memory retention, and problem-solving abilities, leading to better grades and overall academic success. Proper nutrition fuels brain development and function, resulting in improved attention spans, alertness, and cognitive processing. Access to healthy school meals can contribute to a reduction in childhood obesity and related health problems, leading to fewer absences due to illness and a greater engagement in school. Universal free meals can help bridge the nutritional gaps that often exist between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, fostering greater equity in both health and educational opportunities.

As educators, we witness firsthand the impact of hunger on our students' ability to learn. House Bill 5742 offers a powerful solution by ensuring that all children, regardless of income or zip code, have access to the nourishment they need to be successful in school. This is not simply about providing food; it is about investing in all students' potential and creating a more supportive and equitable educational system for our children.

The RIFTHP urges you to recognize the compelling evidence and the transformative potential of "Healthy School Meals for All" and to pass House Bill 5742. By doing so, you will be making a significant investment in the health, well-being, and academic future of Rhode Island's children.

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