

Representative Marvin L. Abney
House Finance Committee
State House
Providence, RI

April 28, 2025

Testimony in Support of H5742 Relating to Education - Healthy School Meals For All

Dear Chair Abney and Honorable Committee Members:

NASW-RI Chapter is in strong support of H5742 Relating to Education - Healthy School Meals For All. We believe this bill is pivotal because it will: 1) increase access to healthy school meals for students, and 2) address the barriers relating to education for children and adolescent students by addressing food insecurity in schools.

In the past year, 38 percent of Rhode Island households were struggling to afford adequate food and currently 1 in 7 children are faced with a food insecurity¹. Despite many Rhode Island families experiencing food insecurity, not all school meals are provided for free. Currently, only families who fall under the 130 percent poverty line are eligible for free meals.

When children don't have access to adequate meals, their chances of academic, behavioral, and emotional challenges increase². Families can also experience stress related to food insecurity which can negatively impact students³. Different communities across Rhode Island have disproportionate access to adequate food. Addressing racial inequity with food insecurity can help be mitigated by providing free and healthy school meals.

By passing H5742, we will take an important step in reducing the number of Rhode Island Students struggling with food insecurity while simultaneously supporting their physical and mental wellbeing to help foster a safe educational environment. We urge you to increase access to healthy school meals for students and pass this bill as soon as possible. If you have any questions or would like to follow up further, we would be glad to connect with you.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director
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¹Feeding America. (2024). <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/rhode-island>

²Issue Brief - Child Hunger in Rhode Island. Rhode Island Kids Count. (2020, December). https://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Issue%20Briefs/FINAL%206779%20ChildHungerIB_v10.pdf?ver=2020-12-03-142019-907

³ Healthy School Meals for All. (2024). <https://rischoolmeals4all.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Healthy-School-Meals-for-All-flyer-2024-FINAL.pdf>