

April 28, 2026

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

RE: H 7793

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of NEARI, I write in strong support of House Bill 7793, an act to establish Healthy School Meals for All for Rhode Island public school students. This legislation represents a thoughtful and impactful step toward ensuring that every child in our state has consistent access to the nutrition they need to learn, grow, and succeed.

As a former teacher, I have seen firsthand the profound effect that access to healthy meals has on students' ability to focus, engage, and thrive in the classroom. I have also witnessed the challenges faced by students who come to school hungry, often distracted, discouraged, and at a significant disadvantage academically and socially. No child can be expected to perform at their best when their most basic needs are unmet.

H 7793 is about more than nutrition, it is about equity, dignity, and opportunity. By ensuring that all students, regardless of family income, have access to healthy school meals, this legislation removes stigma and creates a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. It guarantees that no student is singled out or made to feel different because of their economic circumstances.

Importantly, this bill takes a thoughtful and phased approach to implementation, beginning with elementary students, expanding to middle school, and ultimately including all high school students by the 2028–2029 school year. This timeline allows districts to build capacity, strengthen infrastructure, and ensure that the program is implemented effectively and sustainably.

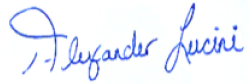
H 7793 is also fiscally responsible. It directs schools to maximize the use of available federal funding through programs such as the Community Eligibility Provision. By leveraging federal resources, the bill minimizes the financial burden on both local districts and the state, while ensuring that funds are used efficiently to directly benefit students.

Schools have begun enhancing nutrition standards, adopting better food practices, implementing innovative strategies to reduce food waste, and strengthening recycling efforts. These changes are helping to create healthier, more sustainable school environments. Passage of this bill will build on that progress and further advance a more equitable and forward-thinking public education system.

Healthy school meals are an investment in our students, our educators, and the future of Rhode Island. Ensuring that every child has access to nutritious food during the school day supports academic success, improves overall well-being, and strengthens our communities.

For these reasons, NEARI strongly urges passage of House Bill 7793.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Lucini". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".

Alexander Lucini  
Government Relations Director, NEARI