



Dear Esteemed Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

April 28, 2026

**Support House Bill 7793**

The Rhode Island Certified School Nurse Association respectfully urges you to support and fund **Healthy School Meals for All Rhode Island** in the FY27 Budget.

This legislation ensures that every student has access to free, nutritious breakfast and lunch during the school day, regardless of income. As school nurses, we see firsthand how essential this is. Students come to our offices daily with headaches, stomachaches, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating, often because they have not eaten. Hunger is a health issue and it is a barrier to learning.

During the pandemic, universal free school meals worked. Students ate, stigma decreased, and they were better prepared to learn. Since that program ended, many families, especially those who do not qualify for free meals but still struggle financially, have fallen through the cracks.

Food insecurity remains a serious issue in Rhode Island, affecting nearly one in three households, with even higher rates among families with children. When students are hungry, they cannot focus, their attendance suffers, and their long-term health is at risk.

Healthy School Meals for All would:

- Ensure students are ready to learn
- Improve attendance and academic performance
- Eliminate stigma and unpaid meal debt
- Reduce administrative burden for schools

Other states, including Massachusetts and Maine, have already made this investment. We urge Rhode Island to do the same.

We encourage the state to maximize federal funding options, such as the Community Eligibility Provision, to reduce costs. This is a smart, achievable investment in student health, educational outcomes, and equity.

Every child in Rhode Island deserves access to the nutrition they need to succeed. We urge you to support and fund Healthy School Meals for All in the FY27 Budget.

**Thank you for your consideration.**

**Sincerely,**

Rhode Island Certified School Nurse Association