



**Testimony in Support**  
**An Act Relating to Education - Federal Aid**  
**May 19, 2026**

The Latino Policy Institute submits this testimony in support of S2083, legislation that would establish a phased-in statewide “Healthy School Meals for All” program for Rhode Island students.

Access to nutritious meals is fundamental to student success, health, and long-term well-being. Across Rhode Island, too many families continue to experience food insecurity and economic strain, particularly working-class families, immigrant families, and communities of color. The legislation correctly recognizes that student hunger is linked to absenteeism, behavioral challenges, and poorer academic outcomes, while healthy school meals are associated with improved student performance and well-being.

For many children, school meals are not supplemental, they are essential. Students cannot fully engage in learning when they are distracted by hunger or uncertainty about where their next meal will come from. Universal meal programs help remove barriers that disproportionately impact low-income families while also eliminating stigma for students who currently rely on free or reduced-price lunch programs.

The Latino Policy Institute particularly supports the bill’s emphasis on maximizing federal reimbursement opportunities and utilizing programs such as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to reduce costs to districts and the state while expanding access for students. Rhode Island should pursue every available federal resource to strengthen student nutrition and educational equity.

We also commend the legislation’s recognition that meal quality and cultural relevance matter. The bill encourages schools to provide culturally relevant meals and engage student and family voices in menu development. This is especially important in a state where the student population is increasingly diverse and multilingual. Students and families should see themselves reflected in the food served in schools, and culturally responsive meal programs can increase participation and improve trust between schools and communities.

Additionally, the phased implementation approach provides districts with time to plan operationally while ensuring that Rhode Island moves toward a long-term vision where every child has access to healthy meals regardless of household income.

Investing in universal school meals is an investment in educational outcomes, public health, economic stability, and child well-being. It is also a recognition that addressing hunger is a shared public responsibility.

For these reasons, the Latino Policy Institute respectfully urges the Senate Finance Committee to support passage of S2083.

Thank you for your consideration.

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