



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

To: Senate Finance Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: May 19, 2026
Re: Healthy School Meals for All
Testimony in **Support of S 2083** (Acosta, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of S 2083, legislation that establishes a phased-in statewide universal school breakfast and lunch program to ensure Rhode Island students have access to healthy meals regardless of household income.

Educators and school staff understand that students cannot learn effectively when they are hungry. Food insecurity directly impacts attendance, concentration, behavior, academic performance, and overall student well-being. The findings contained within this legislation recognize that nearly 40% of Rhode Island households with children experienced food insecurity in 2024 and that student hunger is associated with poorer learning outcomes and increased absenteeism. Universal access to school meals is an educational strategy as much as it is a public health intervention.

This legislation appropriately recognizes that healthy school meals improve educational outcomes while supporting long-term health benefits. By phasing implementation over three years and maximizing access to available federal reimbursement programs, S 2083 takes a thoughtful approach that prioritizes both student needs and fiscal sustainability.

Universal school meals also reduce stigma associated with free and reduced-price meal programs, increase participation, and ensure students receive consistent nutrition throughout the school day. For many children, school meals provide a substantial portion of daily nutritional intake.

Rhode Island's public schools serve students with increasingly complex academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. Ensuring students have access to healthy meals is a foundational support that strengthens learning conditions, promotes equity, and improves student outcomes statewide.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support S 2083.

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