



**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 2663** (Vargas, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of S 2663, 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. Nearly 40% of Rhode Island households with children experienced food insecurity in 2024, and student hunger is consistently 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. For many students, school meals provide a substantial portion of daily nutrition and directly support their ability to engage and succeed in the classroom.

S 2663 takes a thoughtful approach by phasing implementation over three years while maximizing access to available federal reimbursement programs to reduce costs to districts and the state. The legislation also recognizes the importance of meal quality, culturally responsive food options, and local procurement where possible.

Universal school meals reduce stigma associated with free and reduced-price meal programs, increase participation, and ensure students have equitable access to nutrition throughout the school day.

Rhode Island's public schools serve students with increasingly complex academic, social, and 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 2663.

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