

Testimony
for Senate Finance Committee Hearing



The Rhode Island State
Council of Churches

Each child belongs to all of us and they will bring us a tomorrow in direct relation to the responsibility we have shown to them. —Maya Angelou

I am offering testimony in support of S 2663 “Healthy School Meals for All.”

No child chooses the circumstances into which they are born. Yet, children bring their circumstances with them into the classroom. Children in poverty bring silent burdens which often include hunger. Hunger has immediate destructive physical consequences on a child. A hungry child is not physically prepared to learn.

Hunger also takes a toll on children’s spiritual well-being. It erodes a child’s sense of safety, belonging and self-worth. Feeding all schoolchildren, without condition or stigma, is a moral imperative flowing from our shared humanity. When we feed a child, we affirm the child’s inherent worth and dignity. When we feed a child, we send a powerful message: *You matter. You belong. You are not alone.*

As a member of a church that operates a food pantry, I am aware of the benefits and limitations of our effort. During the Federal Government shut-down of the Fall of 2025, and in spite of aggressive food drives, we came face to face with the depletion of our supplies. Food pantries with volunteer food drives help but are not a solution to food insecurity. Should this happen again, school meals for all children will provide a safety net.

I would like to suggest that cost considerations should also include the burden carried by children. Yet, how do we measure a child’s hunger, a child’s health or capacity to learn? The moral calculation we face is not whether we can afford to feed every child, but whether we can afford not to.

I urge passage of this bill.

Respectfully,

The Rev, Eugene T. Dyszlewski

Commissioner, Social Justice Rhode Island State Council of Churches.