



Chair Louis DiPalma
Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly

May 19, 2026

Re: In support of Senator Vargas' Healthy School Meals Bill, S2663

Dear Chairman and members of the Committee,

As the CEO of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, I write in strong support of S 2663, sponsored by Senator Vargas, which will provide healthy school breakfast and lunch to all students in Rhode Island at no charge.

More Rhode Island families are struggling to afford enough food. In recent years, the rate of food insecurity among households with children has risen dramatically, and our latest data show that this trend has not reversed. Today, member agency food pantries across the Food Bank's statewide network are seeing around 100,000 visits each month, a clear sign of the growing need facing families in every community.

Food insecurity is being driven by the high and persistent cost of food, housing, and other basic needs, as well as reductions in federal supports that previously helped families stay afloat. During the COVID-19 pandemic, universal free school meals showed us what is possible when barriers are removed and every child can count on nutritious meals at school. It worked: more children were able to access school breakfast and lunch, families had one less expense to worry about, and schools could feed students more effectively.

When the universal meals policy ended, many families once again faced barriers to accessing school meals. Too many students lost a reliable source of daily nutrition. For some children, school breakfast and lunch are the healthiest and most consistent meals they receive all day. When access to those meals is interrupted, their health, well-being, and readiness to learn are put at risk.

Senator Vargas' bill S2663 gives Rhode Island the opportunity to build on what worked and make sure every student has access to healthy school meals every school day, without stigma or financial barriers.



By making lunch available at no charge to all students, this bill will increase participation in school meals, reduce child hunger, and support better academic and health outcomes.

As the leader of an organization that sees the effects of food insecurity every day, I can say with confidence that no single program can solve this problem alone. Healthy School Meals for All is a critical part of a broader set of tools—alongside SNAP, tax credits, and community-based food assistance—that Rhode Island needs to effectively address food insecurity and support children’s success. I respectfully urge you to support S2663.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to addressing food insecurity.

Sincerely,

Melissa Cherney

CEO, Rhode Island Community Food Bank