

RESOLUTION

Subject: Supporting Free School Lunches for all Kentucky Public School Students

Submitted by: Sarah Taheri, MS and Onajia Stubblefield, MS (Medical Student Section)

Referred to: Reference Committee

WHEREAS, 1 in 5 children in Kentucky face hunger¹; and

WHEREAS, the National School Lunch Program (“NSLP”) reimburses states for the provision of free and low-cost nutritionally balanced meals to qualifying students such that students whose families have incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for free lunch²; and

WHEREAS, the eligibility guidelines result in students, whose parents make more than 130 percent of the federal poverty level but not enough to consistently afford full or reduced-price meals, incurring lunch debt³; and

WHEREAS, policies at some schools are such that until the debt is paid off, children receive “cold and less nutritious meal[s], like a cheese or peanut butter sandwich”⁴; and

WHEREAS, the practice of giving alternative meals, physically marking students as different from their peers may enhance stigma, and lead to students feeling shame or embarrassment thereby negatively affecting their social and emotional wellbeing⁵; and

WHEREAS, proper nutrition is essential for the healthy growth and development of children and malnutrition and undernutrition can lead to serious health issues in children including stunting, weakened immune systems, and poor mental development^{6,7}; and

WHEREAS, the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) expanded free meals to all students in schools that have at least 25% of students meeting eligibility criteria for the NLSP, but many schools do not qualify or choose not to participate because the federal government may not cover the entirety of the cost of the expanded program⁸; and

WHEREAS, studies examining universal free school meals that included free lunch found positive associations with diet quality, food security, and academic performance⁹; and

WHEREAS, eight states currently provide free school meals to all students regardless of income, and many more are drafting or have introduced free school meal legislation including the neighboring states of Illinois, Ohio, and Tennessee¹⁰; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that KMA supports universal free school lunch for all public school students in Kentucky.

References:

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4. *Universal School Meals Policy Brief*, First Focus Campaign for Child. (2023), <https://campaignforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/10/FFFCFC-Universal-School-Meals-Policy-Brief.pdf>.
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7. Martins, Vinicius JB, et al. "Long-lasting effects of undernutrition." *International journal of environmental research and public health* 8.6 (2011): 1817-1846.
8. *Final rule: Child nutrition programs - CEP increasing options for Schools*. Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2023, September 26). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-092623>
9. Cohen, Juliana FW, et al. "Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: a systematic review." *Nutrients* 13.3 (2021): 911.
10. Sheldon, M. (2024, April 9). *States that have passed Universal Free School Meals (so far) - *update**. NYC Food Policy Center (Hunter College). <https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/states-with-universal-free-school-meals-so-far-update/>