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Darnell T. Brewer

State Representative, Ohio House District 18

Ladies and gentlemen of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee, esteemed colleagues, and fellow Ohioans, I would first like to thank Chairman Representative Manning, Vice Chair Representative Fowler-Arthur, and Ranking Member Representative Robinson for bringing this legislation to the agenda.

I am State Representative Darnell T. Brewer, serving House District 18, and today, I stand before you as one of the primary sponsors of House Bill 408 along with my colleague Representative Mohamed. House Bill 408 stands as our commitment to ensuring that every child in Ohio receives nutritious meals and essential services during school, laying the groundwork for a healthier, more equitable learning environment.

In Ohio, the future is shaped in our classrooms, where our children's well-being should be the utmost priority. Yet, the harsh reality is that food insecurity burdens many students' potential, affecting their academic focus and overall growth. House Bill 408 seeks to address this pressing issue by requiring public schools to offer meals and related services to all students, eliminating financial barriers.

Key aspects of this bill reflect our commitment to this cause:

Universal Access to Meals: Students who request a meal shall receive one, with no exceptions. The ability to pay existing meal debts will not hinder receiving a nutritious meal.

Provisions to Protect Student Dignity: The bill strictly prohibits practices that could harm a student's self-esteem or well-being, such as discarding served meals due to unpaid debts, requiring students to perform chores as payment, using meal refusal as a disciplinary measure, or any form of public identification or stigmatization related to meal debts.

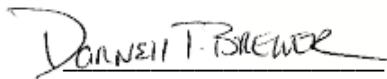
Communication and Debt Management: The mandate is that all communications regarding meal debts be directed to parents or guardians, not the students. This approach ensures that the financial matters are handled with discretion, safeguarding the students' emotional well-being.

Guidance from the Department of Education: The bill instructs the Department of Education to provide districts with guidance on collecting meal debts, including best practices, and implementing online payment systems to simplify and privatize the process.

The impacts of House Bill 408 are far-reaching: Enhancing student health and academic performance, as well-nourished children show improved cognitive function and school attendance. Significantly reducing food insecurity ensures no child faces hunger in our schools. We are strengthening our communities by nurturing a healthy, well-educated future generation. Addressing potential concerns, I emphasize the meticulous planning behind this bill's funding and implementation strategies. The investment in our children's health and education promises substantial long-term benefits.

In conclusion, House Bill 408 represents a pivotal investment in the futures of Ohio's children. It's about their health, their success, and our collective future. I urge your support for this vital legislation as we strive to nourish the minds and bodies of our next generation, fostering a brighter future for all of Ohio.

Shining A Light,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DARNELL T. BREWER". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

State Representative Darnell T. Brewer

