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Thank you for the opportunity to give you this short testimony. This is my first time. I have had the privilege to serve nearly 3.5 million school meals to Ohio students over the last 6 years. Please hear my voice as an echo from my students and all students from our state. School meals are a cornerstone to our primary and secondary school structure, but there has been little change to the structure of meal benefits since they were instituted by the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. Currently, the federal government fiscally supports free and reduced-price benefits, but our state does not share in this responsibility. A few generations ago, the program parameters were appropriate, but our demographics today are much different and there is a defined gap of students who miss the opportunity for benefits – the rich don't make enough to be rich, and the poor make too much to be poor. This is the gap that Ohio can fill in. Our movement is the voice for these kids. This is not your Ohio K-12 schools needing more money, this is the families that unfortunately fall within the gap of not qualifying for benefits. With appropriate state funding, school food service departments in our urban cities and rural areas could offer breakfast and lunch as no cost to their students, fueling them during their education and eliminating all the stigma that has perpetuated for decades about school meal benefits. A positive outcome from the pandemic is the pilot plan we operated for free school meals for all. We already know, with data, the number of students that would eat school meals if the opportunity was available at no cost. In school year 2021-2022, when most institutions were back to in-person learning, not every student participated in breakfast or lunch, but those that were hungry had the chance to eat. Last year, I served about 20% more reduced-price or full pay students in my district than prior to the pandemic. That's why we're here; those are the students that need this opportunity while they are at school. Let's find a way to keep our kids fed.

Thank you for your time.