



12 March 2025

Dr. Bradley Marino
HB 96 Interested Party Testimony
Ohio House Finance Committee
Healthy School Meals for All

Good afternoon, members of the Ohio House Finance Committee. Thank you, Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, and Ranking Member Sweeney, for the opportunity to provide you with my comments on why Ohio should take the next step and provide lunches, free of charge, to all Ohio students. Free school meals ensure success for all Ohio children.

Every day in Ohio, thousands of children from families that are slightly above the income threshold for free school meals struggle with inadequate nutrition necessary for their development and academic success. Universal school meals present a straightforward, equitable solution by providing all students with access to nutritious food, eliminating both stigma and economic barriers.

The success of universal school meals in states like Tennessee, where programs have led to better school attendance, improved student behavior, and enhanced academic performance, underscores the potential benefits for Ohio.

Ohio's families and communities recognize the value of these programs, understanding that they not only support immediate nutritional needs, but also contribute to long-term educational and health outcomes.

I strongly urge this committee and the Ohio House to prioritize universal school meals in HB 96, the state budget bill. This initiative would significantly reduce educational disparities, elevate student achievement, and ensure every Ohio child has the opportunity to thrive.