

Testimony: HB 96
FY 2026-27 Biennial Budget
Senate Health Committee
Erin Lichty, Elementary Guidance Counselor
Antwerp Local Schools
May 15, 2025

Good afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking member Liston, and members of the Senate Finance Health Committee. My name is Erin Lichty and I am the Elementary Guidance Counselor for the Antwerp Local Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of the FY 2026-27 budget request for the Children's Hunger Alliance.

The Antwerp Local Schools is an example of how schools can successfully expand the number of students coming to school prepared to learn. We believe that students who come to school hungry or worried about where they will get their next meal are unable to focus on learning. We want to remove that barrier and help kids to be well fed and feel safe and secure.

Before partnering with CHA's Weekend Meals program, we had a lot of kids whose biggest meals were at school. We worried about them over the weekend. We have some parents who are incarcerated and the kids are living with grandparents. They appreciate the help because they're raising their grandkids. We have a lot of stories of kids who didn't have food at home. We had kids who were making their own meals at home because they weren't in stable households. I've had kids tell me they went home and didn't really eat over the weekends because mom or dad didn't cook for them.

What's great about Weekend Meals is knowing students have something for the weekend and they're not stressed out over the weekend. They're excited when the boxes come in every Friday. It makes them feel content to go home over the weekend knowing they have something to eat without having to worry about mom or dad or somebody fixing it for them. We've gotten really good feedback from the kids.

Potential cuts to the weekend meal program would be most devastating to the students who rely on it. I think we would have some kids who are stressed out. Fending for themselves over the weekend. It's also helpful for those families on a limited income trying to raise grandkids.

In conclusion, Chairman Huffman and committee members, I would urge your support for the budget request of the Children's Hunger Alliance and respectfully request that you support Amendment SC0300 in the State Operating budget that would add \$1.25 million per fiscal year to restore CHA to flat funding (\$3.75 million per year). Restoration of these funds would prevent potential cuts to the weekend meal program.

I would now be pleased to answer any questions you may have.