

**Testimony: HB 96**  
**FY 2026-27 Biennial Budget**  
**Senate Health Committee**  
**Courtney Kirby, School Social Worker**  
**Alliance Academy**  
**May 13, 2025**

Good afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking member Liston, and members of the Senate Finance Health Committee. My name is Courtney Kirby and I am the School Social Worker for the Alliance Academy. 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 Alliance Academy 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.

Being a Title I school, the vast majority of kids are below the poverty line. Probably at least once a day, I get asked about food resources. We are a school where a lot of our kids don't have the food they need over the weekend. Before the food boxes, there wasn't a way for us to send them home with food for the weekend. The first benefit is that it's easy for kids to take. It's portable. A lot of them are walkers or they take the bus. The other thing is that it's things they don't need to cook. A lot of parents work on the weekend and kids spend their time on their own. They don't have to use a stove. The Weekend Meals box has a lot of variety of food. It's shelf stable.

A lot of our families are experiencing homelessness. The boxes might be all they have before they could get other resources. Some families are living in shelters or don't have a shelter and are living in cars. I've seen the meal boxes help families that didn't have a refrigerator. The benefits of Weekend Meals is that it provides food for children that don't have those food resources at home and that may need to eat on their own because they don't always have an adult to cook for them.

Potential cuts to the weekend meal program would be disappointing to the kids at our school. They look forward to the boxes and kids tell me all the time, 'We don't have food at home.' Without the program, there would be kids that would go hungry.

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.