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Title: School Nurse

Organization or Agency:

Topic: SB00929 - AA EXPANDING SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE FREE SCHOOL MEA...

Supports

Testimony:

As a school nurse in CT I have seen first hand the real need for daily lunch programs to be provided to our students. I live in one district and work in another district and have first-hand knowledge from each district with a different perspective of each. The district I live in is considered an affluent district; that does not mean all who live there are affluent, and certainly not all who go to school within the district are. When lunches were available for all, many students were eating at school. There are families who live in this community who do not qualify for benefits, but are really strapped to make ends meet and this provides food security to those many do not know are insecure in what food is available at home. Providing lunch will ensure that those who may ride the line of having just barely enough, will have enough each day. When families can save some cash from lunch expenses, more food is available for breakfast and dinner. These are the families who are not going to have any other outlet in which to get services or help, but this help can mean the difference between a full belly each day and living each day in fear there will not be anything to eat for dinner since they were able to bring lunch to school. My first hand experience in seeing middle school, high school, and even elementary school students arrive at school who just arrived at school having had nothing to eat, would astound the general public to know how many kids arrive at school without having had anything to eat. Many of these students use the excuse of "no time" when in reality there is "no food". Years of research has shown that students who are fed have better outcomes in school. I see students daily who have headaches and stomachaches, and during the assessment it is revealed they have not eaten or had anything to drink. Simply feeding them provides the solution to their ailment. Often in day to day conversation about providing lunch, what is not discussed is the toll of stress and how living under duress leads to poor health outcomes later in life. Stress releases hormones, and after years of having constant release of stress hormones health begins to fail. We have a chance to reduce up to 12 years of stress some kids would otherwise be living with. The stress of not knowing if there will be enough food in their stomachs. Making meals available to each of our students in CT also removes the social stigma that many families and students feel by needing to apply for free and reduced lunch. Yes, the stigma is real and many families who would qualify and need the support are simply too afraid to apply for the help their family will need. I have seen firsthand the number of students who were eating meals at school decrease as a result of the free meal program ending. The other aspect I want to mention is when a student is eating a meal prepared by a school nutrition expert- that is what they are getting. A meal that has been prepared expertly to meet the nutritional needs of the student. Many students will learn healthy eating habits that will stay with them throughout life by having a healthy meal modeled each day.

In summary providing a school lunch across the board to our CT students ensures that all students have nutritious meals available, it will reduce stress in students who have food insecurity, it will reduce headaches and stomachaches and improve overall health, it will avoid any stress for families who are too afraid to apply for benefits of a reduced lunch and it will add to the overall success of our schools.