



Shared Prosperity, Thriving Ohioans

## **No child should go to school hungry**

State Board of Education Public Comment

**Will Petrik, Budget Researcher**

Board President McGuire, Vice President Manchester, and members of Ohio's State Board of Education, my name is Will Petrik and I am the budget researcher with Policy Matters Ohio, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. Our mission is to create a more prosperous, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio. Our work focuses on supporting working Ohioans, especially those who are paid low wages, and ensuring all Ohioans, no matter where they live or what they look like, have stability, security and dignity.

Today we're asking you take a meaningful step to end child hunger in Ohio and improve the health, development and well-being of Ohio's children by passing the Resolution to Recommend to the General Assembly the use of American Rescue Plan Act (federal covid-relief) funds to provide 100% free breakfast and lunch to all Ohio students.

We also ask you to oppose the resolution that targets some children based on their gender identity and threatens vital federal funding for school food and nutrition programs. This proposal will harm kids across Ohio. It is meant to divide and distract Ohioans from the issues we can all agree on: All children should have the freedom to be themselves at school, and we all need to get enough to eat to learn and thrive.

**Whatever their race, gender identity, or how much money their parents are paid, no child should go to bed hungry.** Yet, an estimated 463,841 children in Ohio lived in poverty in 2021.<sup>1</sup> One reason why so many children and families live in poverty is because too many jobs pay poverty-level wages. Four of Ohio's 10 most common jobs, employing nearly 453,000 Ohioans, don't pay enough for a typical worker to feed a family of three without food assistance.<sup>2</sup>

The result is tens of thousands of families struggling to pay the bills, make the rent and put food on the table. According to census data collected between July 27 and August 8, 2022, an estimated 1.2 million adults with children in their household in Ohio had difficulty paying for usual household expenses, such as food, rent, car payments, medical expenses and student loans, in the last week. The same survey estimated over 250,000 Ohio adults with kids reported that they "sometimes" or "often" did not have enough to eat in the last week.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Will Petrik, "New census data show Ohio lags most states in median income and childhood poverty," Policy Matters Ohio, September 15, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3T4IN8P>

<sup>2</sup> Michael Shields, "New data show wages up for many, but four of Ohio's 10 most common jobs pay near poverty," Policy Matters Ohio, April 28, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Sie5qQ>

<sup>3</sup> Household Spending Table 1. Difficulty Paying Usual Household Expenses in the Last 7 Days and Food Table 1. Food Sufficiency for Households, in the Last 7 Days, by Select Characteristics: Ohio, U.S. Census Bureau, Week 48 Household Pulse Survey: July 27 - August 8, accessed on Sept 19, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3eXOpSc>



No child should go to school hungry. Living in constant economic insecurity harms children and limits their opportunities. Research shows it compromises children’s ability to learn and grow and harms their income and health as adults.<sup>4</sup> Children in poverty and children who are hungry are more likely to do worse in school compared to their peers from more affluent families.

These outcomes don’t have to be the norm for kids from families with low wages in Ohio. Together, we can improve the health and well-being of Ohio’s students, end child hunger, and strengthen our education and health systems by providing free healthy school meals to every student in Ohio.

Research shows school meals improve school attendance, academic achievement, standardized test scores, and overall cognitive function. Having meals at school is also linked with greater food security and improved physical and mental health outcomes.<sup>5</sup> If state board members direct schools to ignore federal Title IX protections, more kids across the state will be at risk of not having enough to eat and getting the school meals they need to learn and thrive.

Together, we must make sure all children in Ohio have what they need to thrive. That includes the freedom to be their full selves in school, and the assurance that they will have enough to eat. Like textbooks, transportation, and supportive teachers, school meals are a critical part of a child’s education and future success.

This is why we ask you and your colleagues to support and pass the Resolution to Recommend to the General Assembly the use of American Rescue Plan Act and oppose the resolution that will harm kids who don’t conform to the dominant norms around gender and that would limit schools’ ability to feed kids free breakfast and lunch. Instead, let’s send a message to all Ohio kids that they matter, and they belong.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

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<sup>4</sup> “A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty,” National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3DJKAKT>

<sup>5</sup> “The Impact of Breakfast after the Bell,” No Kid Hungry, Center for Best Practices, Accessed on October 6, 2022, from <https://bit.ly/3MfmidN>