

**Urging New York State Governor And New York State Legislature To Adopt Legislation Guaranteeing Universal Access To Free Meals For Students In Grades K-12**

Referred to: The Economic Development, Planning, Education, Employment, Arts and Agriculture Committee (Chairman Cahill and Legislators Corcoran, Criswell, Hewitt, Litts, Maloney and Sperry) and The Health, Human Services and Housing Committee (Chair Walter and Legislators Corcoran, Erner, Lopez, Nolan, Petit, and Uchitelle)

Legislator Megan Sperry and Legislators Criswell, Erner, Hansut, Hewitt, Uchitelle, and Walter offer the following:

WHEREAS; Food insecurity, defined as having reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet (low food security), or having multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake (very low food insecurity) is a primary social determinant of health; and

WHEREAS, the United States Department of Agriculture reports that over 34 million people in the country, including 12 million children, are food insecure; and

WHEREAS, child hunger is associated with increased risk of anemia, lower nutrient intake, deficiencies in cognitive development, aggression, anxiety, hospitalization and poorer general health, asthma, behavioral problems, depression, suicidal ideation, and poor oral health; and

WHEREAS, the reduction of food insecurity and hunger is cost-effective, supports social and economic equity, and provides a serious investment in the health and wellness of children who will grow up to be the workforce, parents, and leaders of the future; and

WHEREAS, a federal program was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic giving school districts across the nation a waiver to provide free lunch to all students; and

WHEREAS, the voucher program expired in June 2022 requiring parents and/or caregivers to once again apply and qualify for free or reduced cost meals for students; and

WHEREAS, in response to the voucher expiration Massachusetts, Nevada and Vermont have adopted legislation to cover the cost of all student meals for the 2022-2023 school year; and

WHEREAS, California and Maine have gone even further adopting legislation to make universal free lunch to students across their states permanent; and

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WHEREAS, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service National School Lunch Program offers participation in a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) whereby any district, group of schools in a district, or individual school with 40% or more “identified students”, or children eligible for free school meals who are identified by means other than an individual household application, can participate; and

WHEREAS, CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications, rather providing that schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); and

WHEREAS, according to Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) 3,021 of 3,632 eligible and near eligible schools in New York State participate in the Community Eligible Provision; and

WHEREAS, according to available FRAC data for Ulster County School Districts, only 10 of 22 eligible schools (data for the Highland, New Paltz, and West Park Union Free School Districts not provided) are participating in the Community Eligibility Provision program; and

WHEREAS, Hunger Solutions New York reports that households with students attending CEP schools were nearly three times less likely to be food insecure than households with students in CEP eligible schools that choose not to participate; and

WHEREAS, correlations between childhood hunger and effects on truancy, absenteeism, scholastic performance and behavioral issues are well documented; and

WHEREAS, despite calls from a number of state lawmakers to address this issue through the implementation of a universal school meals program, the Governor failed to include funding in the 2023 budget; and

WHEREAS, \$200 million, or 0.09% of the state’s annual budget, is the estimated annual cost to provide every student in grades K-12 in New York State with breakfast and lunch; and

WHEREAS, over 2,000 schools and 800,000 students would be impacted across the state; and

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WHEREAS, according to Feeding America one in ten people, and one in seven children in New York State face hunger, with 12% of Ulster County residents and 17% of Ulster County children reported as being food insecure; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Ulster County Legislature calls upon the state Legislature to adopt and the Governor to sign legislation to address student hunger through guaranteeing universal access to free meals for students in grades K-12; and, be it further

RESOLVED, the Clerk of the Ulster County Legislature shall forward copies of this resolution to New York Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, Chairs of the Senate and Assembly Committees on Education, Health, and Children, and all Ulster County elected Assemblymembers and Senators, and members of the US Senate and House of Representatives,

and move its adoption.

ADOPTED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES:

NOES:

Passed Committee: Economic Development, Planning, Education, Employment, Arts and Agriculture on \_\_\_\_\_.

Passed Committee: Health, Human Services and Housing on \_\_\_\_\_.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:  
NONE