



March 2025

To: House Education Committee

Re: AAUW Supports HB1274-Healthy School Meals-for-All Program

Dear Committee Members,

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) is one of the oldest women's organizations in the country, empowering women since 1881. The mission of AAUW is to advance equity for women and girls through research, education and advocacy. More than 700 community leaders are AAUW members in local branches around the state.

AAUW has led the fight for economic empowerment for women, and we have made progress over the years. Yet women continue to face barriers to reach our full potential. Hunger has been one of these barriers for too many young girls. Thankfully, Colorado has made it easier for children to learn by providing free meals through the Healthy School Meals for All Program that voters approved in 2022.

Providing nutritious school meals for all public school students, free from stigma or stress, enables them to focus on learning. The program has also helped farmers and ranchers, by strengthening Colorado's local food systems. It is truly an investment in Colorado's economic future.

Because this program has brought in more funds than estimated, the Legislature now must ask the voters to approve retaining these funds.

AAUW of Colorado strongly supports HB1274 and urges your YES vote in committee and throughout the process of becoming law.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Su Ryden".

Su Ryden

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American Association of University Women--AAUW is a top-rated 501(c)3 charitable organization whose mission is to advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

House Finance

03/10/2025 01:30 PM

HB25-1274 Healthy School Meals for All Program

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Kim Kolasa For themselves</p>	<p>My name is Dr. Kim Smith Kolasa, and I have been a STEM educator for the last 35+ years and have focused my research on student experiences associated with growing their fresh food onsite. I have also been a local farmer and small business owner. I currently work with Fork Farms, a global food access technology company that partners with 10 Colorado school districts and an equal number in discussion for future partnerships. Our school partners globally and in Colorado consistently report that the shortened supply chain is a good financial investment because they have better cost controls paired with a fresher, more nutritious crop that lasts longer. Partners have also shared that students who grow their food tend to have increased knowledge about, positive perception towards, and consumption of fresh food. Students also participate in entrepreneurial opportunities to learn about food budgets and conduct cost-benefit analyses. With these positive trends come increased student engagement and positive academic outcomes.</p> <p>Support for HB25-1274, and the Local Food Program (LFP) would allow schools to further engage students in growing and consuming their own food, thereby contributing to the positive trends previously mentioned. Support for the LFP would also give school nutrition programs increased control over food supply chains, cost, and quality.</p> <p>The nutritional quality of fresh leafy greens declines steadily from the time of harvest. Therefore, growing and purchasing fresh greens locally supports higher nutritional quality. Given the USDA's requirement to include leafy greens in school lunch programs, support for HB25-1274 and the LFP would give schools the leverage to grow fresh greens on site while engaging students in the process. It would also continue to build the capacity for purchasing, preparing, and promoting other fresh and local foods, thereby supporting local economies.</p> <p>LFP funds help school meal operators stretch their already limited budgets while also investing in Colorado agriculture, shortening supply chains, and getting students involved. Support for HB25-1274 is a win on many levels.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and attention.</p>
<p>Thai Nguyen</p>	<p>The Healthy School Meals for All program is truly a lifeline for our children and communities. Every day, more than 600,000 students benefit from nutritious, free</p>

<p>For Kaizen Food Rescue</p>	<p>meals that reduce stigma, meet their nutritional needs, and ease the financial strain on families and school budgets. But this program can do so much more.</p> <p>Currently, the voter-approved elements, such as increasing wages for those who prepare and serve meals, and forming partnerships with local farmers to include fresh, healthy ingredients, are on hold due to funding shortfalls. This is where House Bill 25-1274 comes in.</p> <p>HB25-1274 is a critical step forward. It secures the funding needed to not only keep this essential program running but to expand it, ensuring we support our school nutrition programs, invest in fair wages for the dedicated people who prepare and serve meals, and provide our children with fresh, local food. This bill also creates a sustainable process that will support the long-term health of the program.</p> <p>As someone who deeply believes in the power of community and the importance of healthy food access, I see this as more than just a policy. It's an investment in our children, our future, and our local economies. By supporting this bill, we make sure every child has the nutrition they need to thrive, and we help families save up to \$1,300 per child per year. This is not just about feeding kids—it's about building stronger, healthier communities.</p> <p>I am proud to stand behind HB25-1274 and encourage everyone to support it, so we can make this vision a reality. Let's fully fund the Healthy School Meals for All program, invest in our children's future, and ensure that every child, regardless of their background or financial status, has access to the food they need to succeed.</p>
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