



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

AAUW Colorado Public Policy Co-Director

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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.

Testimony to House Education Committee in Support of HB25-1274
Clarissa Hayes, Deputy Director - Child Nutrition Programs & Policy
March 6, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity for the Food Research & Action Center to submit testimony in support of [House Bill 25-1274](#), which would fully fund Colorado's Healthy School Meals for All program and provide additional investments to improve the program, including increased wages and support for local foods.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. FRAC has worked for decades to improve and strengthen the federal School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs through federal and state legislation. We work extensively with federal, state, and local government agencies, schools, private nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders to ensure that the programs reach the children who need them.

The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are the two largest child nutrition programs in the United States. Students are in school approximately 180 days a year and many students participate in school-based before and after school care and summer programming. Providing healthy meals to students through the School Nutrition Programs can significantly increase food security for students. In fact, a [recent study](#) found that U.S. children are getting their healthiest meals at school, demonstrating that school meals are one of the federal government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children.

The School Nutrition Programs support academic achievement. School meals serve as both a nutritional support and an educational support because hungry children do not have the focus and energy to learn or get the most out of their school day. There is a strong body of research that links participation in school meals to positive educational and health outcomes for our nation's children. Studies have shown participation in school meals improves students' attendance, behavior, and academic achievement, and reduces tardiness. Students who eat breakfast at school [perform better on standardized tests](#) than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home, and have improved scores in spelling, reading, and math. Additionally, school breakfast reduces the number of visits to the school nurse in the morning, [improves students' mental](#)

[health](#), and reduces behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression. The positive impacts of participating in school meals are long lasting, supporting long-term overall educational attainment among students participating in school meals.

Given these benefits, states across the country are recognizing the importance of free school meals for all students. In addition to Colorado, seven other states have passed permanent School Meals for All policies. Fully funding this important program would not only ease the financial burden on families throughout the state, but it would also maintain Colorado's position as a leader and example for other states considering similar legislation.

Serving all students eliminates the stigma associated with school meals and will put an end to unpaid school meal debt. Offering free and reduced-price meals only to students from low-income households can create a stigma and reduce participation. By providing every student with the opportunity to participate in school meals, the stigma some children, particularly older students, fear of being labeled low-income by their classmates is eliminated. Free meals for all students eliminate school meal debt, which has been a problem for many families and schools under a tiered payment system.

All students should permanently receive free school meals. Serving school meals to all students at no cost has proven to be a gamechanger for students, families and schools, supporting students' education and health and improving school nutrition finances and operations. In Colorado, the program was a success in its first year, with 100% of eligible districts opting into the program.

Providing free school meals to all students is an investment in Colorado's future. Now is the time to fully fund this program, not roll back progress. We urge you to support HB25-1274.

House Education

03/06/2025 01:30 PM

HB25-1274 Healthy School Meals for All Program

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Hannah Kay For AAP Colorado</p>	<p>Testimony in Support of HB 25-1274 Hannah Kay, MD, FAAP</p> <p>Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Hannah Kay. I am a pediatrician in Denver and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics Colorado Chapter and our nearly 800 members across the state. We urge your support of House Bill 1274 to support healthy school meals for all Colorado students.</p> <p>Students who are well fed have improved school performance and health outcomes including healthy weight. School meals are often the most nutritious and substantial meals that students receive each day. We have an opportunity to greatly impact the health of children by supporting healthy school meals for all. Colorado voters have already voted in favor of school lunch for all, and this bill helps to make it a reality, and helps to focus efforts on local farming and food sourcing, which will be of great economic and environmental benefit as well.</p> <p>Children are our greatest asset, but they are also the most vulnerable among us. Quality early childhood nutrition is essential to providing the foundation for a long, healthy life with higher educational attainment and lower rates of chronic disease. I believe that no child should be hungry, and we have the power to make a big impact on hunger and nutrition in Colorado by supporting this bill.</p> <p>Thank you to the bill sponsors for bringing forth this important piece of legislation. On behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics Colorado Chapter, we ask that you please support House Bill 1274 as it would be of great benefit to children and families across Colorado. Let's help our children grow, thrive, and experience the joy of healthful food at school.</p>

	<p>Thank you for your time and consideration.</p> <p>Hannah Kay, MD, FAAP</p>
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March 5, 2025

Support for HB25-1274 – Healthy School Meals for All Program

Dear Members of the House Education Committee,

On behalf of the Jefferson County Food Policy Council (JCFPC), we write to express our strong support for HB25-1274, the Healthy School Meals for All (HSMA) Program. Our Council is committed to fostering a more just, equitable, and sustainable food system in Jefferson County. A critical component of this vision is ensuring that every child has access to nutritious, high-quality meals at school—an investment that benefits not only students but also our local economy, farmers, and food producers.

Over the past year, JCFPC has proudly supported the Jefferson School Food Pilot, an initiative aimed at transforming school food by incorporating family-led, locally sourced, and scratch-cooked meals. This pilot, developed in collaboration with local schools, food service staff, and community members, has demonstrated that community engagement is essential to improving school meals. Through our work, we have confirmed three key findings:

1. **Community Involvement is Key:** When families, students, and local producers are engaged in the design and implementation of school meal programs, meals better reflect the needs and preferences of our diverse student body. The community advisory councils built into the design of HSMA will support students, especially from diverse backgrounds, across the state.
2. **School Meals Must Remain Free:** Access to healthy meals should not be dependent on a family's financial situation. Universal free meals remove stigma, reduce administrative burdens, and ensure that no child goes hungry.
3. **Schools Need Resources to Build on This Foundation:** Expanding scratch cooking and incorporating more local food into school meals requires ongoing investment in kitchen infrastructure, training and pay for food service staff, and partnerships with local producers.

The Jefferson School Food Pilot has laid a strong foundation, but to truly scale this success across the district, our schools need the financial resources to continue improving meal quality and access. Fully funding the HSMA Program is essential to achieving these goals.

We urge the committee to support the passage and full funding of HB25-1274 so that Colorado schools can build upon successful local initiatives like ours and ensure that every child has access to the nutritious meals they need to thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to student well-being. We appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Hallie Nelson

Director
Jefferson County Food Policy Council
hallie@jeffcofpc.org
jeffcofoodpolicy.org

Dear Members of the School Board/Committee,

My name is Nieves, and I am writing to express my strong support for providing healthy meals in schools. As a mother to a four-year-old son and a type 1 diabetic, I understand firsthand the importance of balanced, nutritious meals for children's health and well-being.

Proper nutrition is essential for every child, but for those with chronic conditions like diabetes, it is a necessity. Managing blood sugar levels requires a well-balanced diet rich in whole grains, lean proteins, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately, many school meal programs rely on processed foods high in sugar and unhealthy fats, which can contribute to long-term health issues such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Beyond my personal experience, I want to ensure that my son and his classmates have access to meals that fuel their growing bodies and minds. Studies show that children who eat healthier meals perform better academically and have fewer behavioral issues. As parents, we trust that schools will provide an environment that nurtures our children, and that includes offering nutritious food options.

One way to achieve this is by partnering with local farmers to bring fresh, seasonal ingredients into school meals. Not only would this support the local economy, but it would also provide students with higher-quality, farm-fresh food. Schools could introduce farm-to-school programs where children learn about where their food comes from and how healthy eating benefits them. Imagine students getting excited about trying fresh fruits and vegetables they helped grow in a school garden or visited at a local farm! This hands-on experience could foster a lifelong appreciation for nutritious eating.

Additionally, many families depend on school meals as a primary source of nutrition. By improving the quality of these meals through locally sourced, fresh foods, we can address childhood health disparities and give every student the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their financial situation.

I urge you to support policies that prioritize fresh, wholesome meals in schools. This means incorporating more fresh produce, whole grains, and protein-rich options while reducing the availability of sugary and highly processed foods. Investing in farm-to-school initiatives will not only improve student health but also strengthen our local communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nieves