



April 3, 2024

The Honorable Joseph McNamara, Chair  
House Committee on Education  
Rhode Island House of Representatives  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**SUBJECT: Concerns with House Bill 8094**

Dear Chairman McNamara and Members of the Committee:

The American Heart Association thanks the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 8094 by Rep. Caldwell. This legislation would waive, for one year, the Rhode Island whole grain requirement for meals served in public schools.

Rhode Island has long been a leader in school nutrition. We are concerned that this proposal would roll back existing standards that were developed through a collaborative process. School meals are an important source of nutrients for children. Kids who have more nutritious diets tend to perform better and pay more attention in school.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the waiver language in this bill was added to a section of statute that pertains to competitive foods and beverages sold in schools (outside of school meal programs). The Rhode Island nutrition requirements for reimbursable school meals were adopted through regulation (200-RICR-20-25-4). If there is a concern with the nutrition standards, we believe that requesting a waiver through the RI Department of Education would be a more appropriate avenue.

Let's keep moving forward on school nutrition. In lieu of this bill, we ask committee members to support Healthy School Meals for All (House Bill 7400 by Rep. Caldwell) to ensure all students have access to breakfast and lunch at no cost, regardless of their family income, so they can learn and thrive. This important legislation would increase participation and investments in school meal programs, which in turn would allow for more scratch cooking, purchasing of local products, developing menu items in collaboration with students and families, and providing culturally appropriate meal options.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Tucker".

Megan Tucker  
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<sup>1</sup> Lott M, Miller L, Arm K, Story M. Rapid Health Impact Assessment on USDA Proposed Changes to School Nutrition Standards. March 2020.