

03/06/2024

House Finance Committee

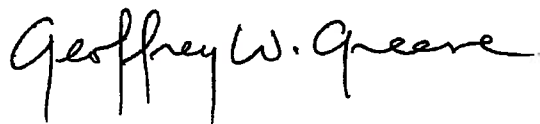
Dear Committee:

This letter is in support of Representative Caldwell's bill H7400. I am a Professor of Nutrition who has been working with children in Rhode Island for the last 35 years. I am also the parent of an 8-year-old child in West Kingston Elementary School. I strongly support the bill to make school meals available at no cost for all public-school students. As part of the research program in my lab, we observed meals served in Rhode Island schools. We found that many children were not taking advantage of the healthy meals provided by schools because of issues related to payment for meals. This was particularly true for breakfasts. Research by others has overwhelmingly supported the finding that children learn best when they are not hungry. Our research also found that lunches brought from home were not as healthy as lunches provided by schools. Although not part of our research, we noted how participation in school meals increased during the COVID period with universal free meals. This bill would support the continuation of a public health success story by providing school meals for all. This is an investment in children, our most important resource.

I want to thank Governor McKee for including some funding for free school meals in his budget, but it does not go far enough to cover all children. The only way to get back to the successes during COVID is to provide free meals for all public-school children.

Please feel free to contact me at (401) 874-4028 or you can email me at ggreene@uri.edu if there are any questions or if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,



Geoffrey W. Greene, PhD, MPH, RDN, LDN
Professor, Director Dietetic Internship and Future Education Model Programs