



AB 319 – Appropriation to provide universal school meals across the biennium

Purpose: Proposes the appropriation of \$100 million across the biennium through a sub-grant process through the Nevada Department of Education for school districts across Nevada to provide universal free breakfast and lunch from 2023 through 2025.

Sponsor: Assemblywoman Sandra Jauregui

Fiscal Note: \$100,000,000

Regulation/Mandate: Takes effect on July 1, 2023.

This letter is in support of the legislation to appropriate funding towards providing universal school meals, effectively combating food insecurity through equity and sustainability, due to its benefits economically, logistically, nutritionally, academically, socially, and ethically. The Southern Nevada Food Council (SNFC), under the auspices of the University of Nevada Reno-Extension, supports social, economically, and ecologically sustainable food systems that promote health. Our members include stakeholders from state and city agencies, food system non profits, researchers, agriculture representatives, charitable food system workers, and many others. Our members work towards our vision of equal access to healthy food for all Southern Nevadans. Our mission is to leverage the collective resources, expertise, and passion of Southern Nevadans to influence the creation of an equitable and sustainable food environment through education and policy. The SNFC supports the school district's application and nutrition-focused objectives that seek to expand the reach of nutrition extension programs in priority populations and establish nutrition guidelines in the charitable food sector.

Many of the emergency addendums during the COVID pandemic were excellent ways to substantially impact food security in Nevada in ways that had never before been seen. The ability for college students to become SNAP eligible was one such excellent measure, and universal school meals to feed our children was another. Continuation of this service is essential to student health and wellness and is already supported by the USDA. Paying for school meals in public schools has been a controversial issue in the past, in that morally and ethically, children should not have to bear the burden of food insecurity. Children should have the right to a nutritious breakfast and lunch during their state mandated school day. For children that have been unable to pay for their meals, they are denied their often only meal available to them that day, and face shame and embarrassment for situations outside of their control. Additionally, it eliminates the burden on school districts that are facing school meal debt.

Our vision is equal access to healthy food for all Southern Nevadans.



There is substantial evidence as to the many benefits of a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school from reducing stigma and embarrassment of not coming from a family able to afford school lunch as well as improved attendance rates, fewer missed school days, and better test scores. Not only are both social and academic measures improved for students, but logistics are improved for school lunchrooms that often have difficulty focusing on fee collection, long and slow lines, and late bills given to children that reduce their time to eat and reduce time for physical activity at recess. A nutritious meal at school improves childhood nutrition that also helps to combat the obesity epidemic our nation is facing, which is especially prevalent in children in poverty.

This bill will increase access to healthy foods for vulnerable populations at risk for chronic disease conditions. This funding will help put food that meets nutrition guidelines for health into the hands of the underserved and that helps combat food insecurity. We commend the bill sponsor for its vision to improve food security and public health through improved nutrition and support of our local health care and local food systems.

Sincerely,

Sabina Malik

Chair of Southern Nevada Food Council

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