

Written Testimony as prepared for delivery in support to HB19-1171 (Rep. Michaelson Jenet) to the House Education Committee by Stephanie Perez-Carrillo

February 21, 2019

- Thank you Madame Chair and members of the committee. My name is Stephanie Perez-Carrillo and I currently work as a Policy Analyst at the Colorado Children's Campaign.
- I want to thank Representative Michaelson Jenet for bringing forth this bill, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1171.
- We support this bill because expanding access to school lunches will improve the health and well-being of all Colorado kids, ensuring they have access to healthy food and adequate nutrition.
- School meals are an important source of essential calories and nutrition for many Colorado kids; these meals help ensure that kids are not hungry during the day and are able to focus at school.
- Adolescence is a period of nutritional vulnerability, and Colorado's high school students require sufficient calories and a well-balanced diet for developmental growth. Between early and middle adolescence, the caloric needs of girls increase by 14 percent while the caloric needs of boys increase by 38 percent.¹
- Improving access to healthy and nutritious school meals can improve a student's academic performance and behavior², while hunger can negatively affect these areas, as well as a student's social-emotional well-being. According to the Food Research Action Center, adolescents struggling with hunger experience more academic, emotional, mental health, and behavioral challenges: in fact, teens who experience hunger are more likely to have been suspended from school and have difficulty getting along with their peers.³⁴
- As we all know, the mental health of our students is an urgent priority in Colorado and hunger makes it more likely that a young person struggles with these issues. Further, a national study found that adolescents who experience hunger are significantly more likely to have attempted suicide.⁵
- Improving access to healthy and nutritious school meals can improve these outcomes. Research from the University of California at Berkeley show that schools that provide

¹ Das, JK, Salam, RA, Thornburg, KL, Prentice, AM, Campisi, S, Lassi, ZS, Koletzko, B. & Bhutta, ZA. (2017). Nutrition in adolescents: physiology, metabolism, and nutritional needs. *Ann N Y Acad Sci*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28436102>

² Anderson, ML, Gallagher, J & Ritchie, ER. (2017). School lunch quality and academic performance. NBER Working Paper No. 23218. Retrieved from: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w23218>

³ [Benefits of School Lunch](#). Food Research & Action Center.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Alaimo, K., Olson, C., Frongillo, E. (2002). [Family Food Insufficiency, but Not Low Family Income, is Positively Associated with Dysthymia and Suicide Symptoms in Adolescents](#). *The Journal of Nutrition*, Volume 132, Issue 4, 1 April 2002, Pages 719–725.

healthy lunches see increased scores on end of year assessments by about 4 percent, with larger increases in scores by up to 40 percent for students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch.⁶

- The state currently covers the reduced price lunch copay for students through 8th grade. We know that families who qualify for reduced-price lunch do not experience a change in their economic circumstances just because their child becomes a high schooler. These families have challenges affording the reduced-price lunch copay, resulting in some children not having access to a nutritious hot lunch.
- This bill serves as one solution that seeks to address this problem for our high schoolers. It would ensure all students can access affordable lunches by extending copay support for reduced-price meals to high school students.
- Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

⁶ Anderson, ML, Gallagher, J & Ritchie, ER. (2017). School lunch quality and academic performance. NBER Working Paper No. 23218. Retrieved from: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w23218>