



Testimony of the Healthy School Meals For All New York Kids Coalition

Presented to the New York State Senate Committee on Finance and the New York State Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

Submitted by:

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Thank you for the opportunity to offer our response to the FY2027 Executive Budget proposal before the Senate Committee on Finance, the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, Chair Krueger, and Chair Pretlow, on behalf of the Healthy School Meals for All New York Kids coalition,

[Healthy School Meals for All New York Kids](#) is a [diverse coalition](#) of over 350 anti-hunger, education, health, agriculture, and equity-focused organizations, alongside students, parents, school administrators, and other concerned New Yorkers. Together, we advocated for New York State to establish and fully fund statewide universal free school meals for all students in schools participating in the federal school meal programs.

We want to recognize the Senate and Assembly for championing universal school meals in New York for the past three years. We are grateful for the Legislature's ongoing support and commitment to universal school meals. This 2025-2026 school year, universal free school meals became a reality in New York State, with more than 2.7 million students across 5,000 schools now having access to free school breakfast and lunch every school day.

Since the Legislature began expanding free school meals in New York, starting in the 2023-2024 school year, more than 700,000 students have gained access to them.

Universal school meals have eliminated the stigma of applying for free meals and being known by their peers as a "free lunch kid." It has eradicated the burden of school meal debt for both families and schools. It also sends a clear message that hunger has no place in New York's schools. [New research](#) underscores the effectiveness of statewide universal school meal policies as a key strategy for reducing food insecurity among households with children.

The program is working – more students are well-nourished and ready to learn. From September 2025 to November 2025, more than 150 million meals were served, 2.5 million meals a day, according to [Governor Hochul](#). This historic investment is translating into immediate, concrete learning and health benefits for New York students. Research shows that universal meals result in [higher test scores](#) in reading and math, [improved student attendance and school environment](#), and kids [consuming more fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and milk](#) than their peers. Beyond the academic benefits, students with access to universal school meals are at [reduced risk of adverse mental health outcomes](#), including anxiety and depression.

Universal school meals also deliver on affordability for New York parents and caregivers. This policy has given families relief in every corner of the state. A survey conducted by Hunger Solutions New York found that universal school meals are a financial lifeline, with 82 percent of surveyed parents reporting that free school meals save their families money.

We are encouraged to see Governor Hochul build on her commitment to address child hunger, especially during the summer break from school, when many children lose access to school meals. Fewer than one in four of our state's low-income children have access to summer meals. We support the Governor's State of the State proposal to expand free summer meal sites, expand rural summer meals, and raise awareness of Summer EBT through a cross-agency outreach campaign. We also support the Governor's proposal for schools to promote SNAP to families through school websites, as it aligns with the current universal school meals policy. We look forward to working with Governor Hochul and the Legislature to ensure the resources needed to support these initiatives are available to schools and community-based organizations to effectively overcome barriers to access.

We urge the Legislature to maintain the \$395M included in the Executive Budget to ensure the universal free school meals program remains fully funded in the FY2027 Enacted Budget. We are deeply grateful for the Legislature's support of this critical investment in New York students and families. This is an investment in our children, families, and communities that will have ripple effects for generations to come. We urge lawmakers to ensure full funding remains in the FY2027 Enacted Budget.