



February 22, 2022

The Honorable Kevin McCarty
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #2 (Education Finance)
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 2054 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Public Comment to Assembly Budget Subcommittee #2, February 22 Hearing, Item 2, School Nutrition

Dear Chairperson McCarty:

On behalf of Nourish California, I appreciate this opportunity to submit written public comments regarding today's hearing on school nutrition, specifically universal school meals. Thank you for considering the benefits and challenges of implementing this program — and the resources necessary for success.

As an organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Californians with low income by increasing access to nutritious, affordable food, we celebrate the truly historic commitment made by the Legislature and Administration to make school meals free of charge to all students. We also acknowledge the tremendous work ahead to make this commitment a sustained, on-the-ground reality for California kids.

We urge the Legislature to provide a guaranteed level of state funding for all meals served under the universal requirement. Structuring the state, per-meal reimbursement as an entitlement rather than a capped appropriation will help provide the stability needed to reach more students and sustain school meal programs over time.

Changes in school enrollment, deep economic inequities, and our state's relentlessly high cost of living are just some of the factors that will drive school meal participation in school year 2022-23 and beyond. As seen in years past with existing school meal reimbursements, failing to sufficiently account for such factors shortchanges schools when meal participation is higher than predicted, leaving districts with just a fraction of the nutrition funding they anticipated for a given year.



Funding instabilities are hard on school meal programs and ultimately hard on kids whose health and development hinge on the consistent availability of nutritious food. To give kids the access they deserve, it is critical that the per-meal reimbursement be guaranteed and not subject to change.

We also urge the Legislature to provide sufficient funding for the infrastructure, equipment, and staffing necessary to guarantee that all students have meaningful access to two free school meals per day. We appreciate the many and varied costs that schools are facing in order to fulfill this important expansion of service. These costs, particularly in historically and chronically under-resourced communities, should not be a barrier to equitable access for students. Increased state investment in school nutrition programs is an investment in children having fair access to basic resources.

School meals are a critical tool to support well being and educational opportunity. We thank you for considering the state funding necessary to implement and sustain free school meals for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tia Shimada', written in a cursive style.

Tia Shimada
Director of Programs
Nourish California