

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE DIBERT

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Chair Tribal Affairs Committee
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House Education Committee
Joint Armed Services Committee

House Bill 12 Version 34-LS0187\H March 4, 2026

Sponsor Statement

"An Act relating to reduced-price meals in public schools; establishing the public school reduced-price meal fund; relating to contributions from permanent fund dividends; and providing for an effective date."

House Bill 12 directs the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to provide funding to school districts allowing them to provide reduced-price meals for free to students who qualify for them. This legislation also creates the public school reduced price within the general fund to distribute these payments and makes the fund eligible for Pick.Click.Give contributions to help offset costs to the state.

Outside of the importance of keeping children fed, school meals are known to instill tremendous benefits to the students that they are available to. Improved test scores, higher attendance rates, and fewer disciplinary incidents are just some of the benefits associated with providing meals to students. By funding school breakfast and lunch, we are funding our students' capacity to learn and take advantage of opportunities and investing in the future of our state.

In focusing school meal aid on children qualifying for reduced-price meals, this bill targets one of the most vulnerable populations of children in the state. Assuming a family of four, these children's families must make less than \$74,352 to qualify for the program. Additionally, families making more than \$52,247 are not eligible for the free school meals program. As of 2026, there are 3,326 Alaskan students that fall within this gap. These are families who earn too much to qualify for free meals, yet still struggle to afford the rising cost of living.

By committing to funding these meals for children who need them the most, we are making a sound investment in Alaska's future. At a time when expenses like groceries are skyrocketing, taking this important expense off families' plates would provide much-needed relief to these Alaskans who are currently struggling to make ends meet.

I respectfully urge your support for the passage of HB 12 to improve student performance and combat food insecurity among this vulnerable group of Alaska children. Please reach out to my office with any questions or concerns.