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From: Lisa Villano [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, January 19, 2026 11:29 PM
To: House Education
Subject: HB 12

Dear House Education Committee Members,

My name is Lisa Villano, and I am a public school teacher in Fairbanks. I'm also an active FEA and NEA-Alaska member, and was a delegate at last weekend's NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly. I submitted a New Business Item (NBI), that was passed with the Legislative Priority 1 package, instructing NEA-Alaska to actively lobby at every level to pass HB 12.

I want you to know that I am really passionate about this bill because after teaching in Shishmaref for six years, where all of our students had free breakfast and lunch every school day (thanks to a federal grant), I saw first hand how big of a piece full bellies are in the puzzle of education. I understand that getting the bill passed will be difficult due to the high fiscal note. Still, I want to do what I can to help. Please please let me know what I can do. Testifying, organizing something, anything! I can be reached through this email or at [REDACTED] I'm serious about this. I really want to help.

Thanks so much,

Lisa Villano

From: Kim [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, January 23, 2026 10:03 AM
To: House Education
Cc: House Finance
Subject: Hb12

Categories: Blue Category

I'm writing to testify on HB12 regarding free school meals for children. While I understand there's likely some pushback on this from a budget perspective, it is by far the least expensive way to have a huge impact on overall school performance. Not providing meals to low income students only exacerbates an existing problem. My husband is a retired teacher from anc schools and has seen how lack of meals for students causes behavioral issues and class disruptions that affect all students. Here's some facts from a quick query on AI:

Free school lunch programs improve student health and academic performance by

reducing food insecurity and increasing consumption of nutritious foods. Evidence indicates that universal free meals lower childhood obesity rates, improve blood pressure, reduce absenteeism/suspensions, and boost math/reading scores without causing weight gain.

Key Scientific Findings on Health and Nutritional Effects

- **Improved Nutrition:** School meals often represent the most nutritious meals children receive, with participants consuming higher levels of fruits, vegetables, and milk compared to non-participants.
- **Lowered Obesity Rates:** Studies found that universal free meals are associated with lower obesity prevalence, contrary to concerns that more access might increase BMI.
- **Nutritional Quality:** Research from the University of Washington showed that the adoption of universal free meals is linked to lower blood pressure, due to better nutritional intake.
- **Reduced Food Insecurity:** A 2024 USDA study indicated that state-level universal free meal policies significantly reduced food insufficiency, particularly for households just above the previous eligibility threshold.

Impact on Education and Cognition

- **Academic Performance:** Providing free meals to all students improves academic outcomes, particularly in math, and reduces behavioral issues such as suspensions.
- **Behavior and Cognitive Function:** Better nutrition from these programs helps with psychosocial well-being, reduces aggression, and supports overall cognitive development by providing essential nutrients.

Societal and Economic Effects

- **Reduced Stigma:** Universal programs eliminate the stigma often associated with traditional free and reduced-price meals, leading to higher participation rates.
- **Household Financial Benefits:** Universal meals reduce the burden on family budgets, specifically for lower-income households.
- **Long-term Health:** Researchers note that universal free meals provide a foundation for better health throughout a child's life.

Policy and Implementation

- **The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)** allows high-poverty schools to offer free meals to all students, which has been shown to reduce obesity and improve overall student well-being.
- **Dietary Standards:** The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) was a key factor in improving the nutritional quality of these meals, which reduced obesity risks for children in poverty.

While some studies found that costs for small schools might increase, the overall consensus is that universal free school meals provide significant, positive, and measurable health and academic outcomes.

Please support this bill.

Sincerely,
Kim Nielsen

