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## Statement on Amendment to H.165

### Senate Committee on Education

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Hunger Free Vermont supports all children having access to nutritious breakfast and lunch at school.

As such, we have worked with various legislators since the first introduction of a universal school meals bill in 2020 to identify a way for independent schools to receive state support for providing universal school meals. Act 151 is, and H.165 would be, the only universal school meals law in the country (either passed or contemplated) that provides any pathway for the inclusion of independent schools.

In 2021, legislators worked with Legislative Counsel, and with the Independent Schools Association, to negotiate a path that would not impose a mandate to provide meals on independent schools, but that would have public Education Fund dollars follow all publicly tuitioned students while preserving the choice to provide universal school meals for independent schools. Independent schools are treated differently from public schools in Act 151 and in H.165, but the avoidance of a mandate to provide both breakfast and lunch using the federal National School Lunch and School Breakfast Acts was the paramount concern of the Independent Schools Association. Hunger Free Vermont respected that position at the time, and we continue to do so.

Act 151 forced several public schools to begin providing meals to students for the first time. We would suggest that full public funding should accompany a mandate to provide breakfast and lunch to all students using the federal school meal programs, both to maximize federal funding and to ensure minimum nutritional standards are met.