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March 9, 2022

**Representative Kathryn Webb, Chair
House Committee on Education
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301**

RE: Testimony for S.100, An act relating to universal school breakfast and the creation of the Task Force on Universal School Lunch

I am writing on behalf of New England Dairy & Food Council regarding S.100, an act relating to universal school breakfast and the creation of the Task Force on Universal School Lunch. Our organization, and the dairy farmers who fund us, support school meal programs because they help decrease food insecurity and ensure kids have access to balanced, nutrient-rich meals that include milk and other dairy foods. By law, our organization cannot take a position on legislation, but we would like to share some information on the importance of school meals.

Addressing Food Insecurity:

- School meals are the second largest food assistance program in our country and are available to close to 79,000 students across Vermont every school day.
- Today in Vermont, one in seven households with children are food insecure.
- Nearly all studies examining universal free school meals found positive associations with school meal participation. Most studies examining universal free school meals that included free lunch found positive associations with diet quality, food security, and academic performance; however, the findings of studies examining only universal free breakfast were mixed.¹

Improving Nutrition:

- Meals served through these programs must meet specific nutrition requirements. These requirements were revised in 2012 to include more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and decrease the amount of sodium and trans-fat.
- Research shows that students who participate in the school meal programs consume more whole grains, milk, fruits, and vegetables during mealtimes and have better overall diet quality, than nonparticipants.^{2,3}

- An evaluation of U.S. research studies from 2010-2015 found that the nutrient content of elementary, middle and preschool packed lunches brought from home contained more calories, fat, saturated fat, desserts, and sugar sweetened beverages than school lunches.⁴

Supporting Student Success:

- Numerous studies have linked the benefits of nutrition for growing children and adolescents for physical health, behavioral health, cognitive performance, and academic achievement. Food insecurity and malnutrition correlate closely with social emotional and academic problems. The integration of a healthy diet, physically active lifestyle, and adequate sleep may provide optimal circumstances for brain development and learning.⁵
- When students consistently start their school day with a nutritious meal, such as school breakfast, they have significantly less absences, an average of 17.5% increase in standardized math scores, are 50% less likely to repeat a grade, and a 20% better chance of graduating high school.⁶

For all these reasons, school meals can dramatically change the lives of kids living with hunger right now and in the future. It's important that school meal programs in Vermont remain strong.

Sincerely,



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References:

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4. Minaya S, Rainville AJ. How Nutritious are Children's Packed School Lunches? A Comparison of Lunches Brought from Home and School Lunches. *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*, Fall 2016; 40, 2.

5. Naveed S, Lakka T, Haapala EA. An Overview on the Associations between Health Behaviors and Brain Health in Children and Adolescents with Special Reference to Diet Quality. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 2020; 17:953
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