

To the House Education Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony and viewpoints this week on the Universal School Meals bill S.100. My name is Cassie Willner, and I am the parent of a second grade student at Union Elementary School in Montpelier, VT. I am in full support of the bill and am asking the committee to pass S.100, including both breakfast and lunch at no cost to all Vermont students, starting with the 2022-23 school year, and paid for from the education fund.

I want to be fully clear with you in sharing that I am a parent who can afford school meals. So why, you might ask, should I care about this bill? And why should the Legislature pass a bill to provide my daughter with free meals? I'm here because I care deeply about providing food for kids and ensuring access to healthy meals and universal meals does just that. Plain and simple. It levels the playing field so there's no account balances, no paperwork required, no associations of who gets school lunches and who does not, and no headache from the schools when students have unpaid bills. It integrates healthy food fully into our education system—one where students are fed, focused and ready to learn.

Thanks to the federal funds available to schools over the last year and a half, we've gotten a taste of universal meals. And it is amazingly wonderful! My daughter especially loves taking home the bagged "to go" breakfasts to have for the next morning. It's so easy and in the midst of very challenging times, this program has helped our family by allowing us to save money and also made life a wee bit easier by simplifying the process. Kids eat in their classroom (due to COVID rules), and without a doubt it's impactful to have most of the kids eating and enjoying the same thing together.

Any obstacles to accessing food are removed with the current scenario and this is true for everyone, every student, no matter what their background or demographics. I now can't imagine it any other way. S.100 will ensure that all students will continue to have access to two meals every day at school and show that food is an essential part of learning. And no student should ever learn what hunger feels like at school.

Thank you again for your time in considering this bill and please be in touch if you have any further questions.

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