



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Education
In Support of H603/S261 An Act relative to Universal School Meals
By Palma McLaughlin, LWVMA Specialist on Children and Family Issues
July 17, 2023**

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts represents 44 local Leagues across the state, from Cape Cod to the Berkshires. We ask you to support H603/S261, An Act relative to Universal School Meals, which would allow every student who wants or needs a school breakfast or lunch to receive meals at no cost.

It's hard to learn when you are hungry.

School meals can account for over half of a child's daily calories. These are children who might not otherwise have reliable access to healthy food at home.

School meals are a critical source of nutrition for many children, helping them learn and be active in the short term, and thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in the long term. School meals help establish lifelong healthy eating habits that can reduce the cases and severity of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, along with the cost associated with these diseases.

A [recent comprehensive study by the Food Research and Action Center](#) (FRAC)¹ found:

- Decreased Child Hunger reported by 80 districts (88%)
- Eliminates Stigma Associated with School Meals reported by 78 districts (86%)
- Supports Household Finances reported by 78 districts (86%)
- Eases Administrative Burden reported by 72 districts (79%)
- Improves Students' Food and Nutrient Intake reported by 64 districts (70%)
- Strengthens Food and Nutrition Services' Image and Relationships reported by 61 districts (67%)
- Supports Academic Achievement reported by 59 districts (65%)
- Builds Community within the School/District reported by 53 districts (58%)
- Improves Operational Efficiencies reported by 51 districts (56%)
- Advances Racial Equity reported by 50 districts (55%)
- Improves Student Behavior reported by 49 districts (54%)

Universal school meals benefit families, teachers, communities, and most of all, students. Massachusetts wisely extended pandemic measures providing school breakfast and lunch at no cost to students in the 2022-2023 school year.

It is time to make it permanent.

¹ FitzSimons, Crystal, and Erin Hysom, *Large School District Report 2023: Operating School Nutrition Programs as the Nation Recovers From the Pandemic*. Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), June 2023.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts strongly urges you to support the passage and implementation of these two bills and to report these bills favorably and in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration.