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Dear Chairman and Honorable Members of the Committee on House Education Health, Human Services & Elderly Affairs,

My name is Joanne Burke, and I live in Newmarket, New Hampshire. As a mother, a health professional, and a former nutrition Professor at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, I come before you to voice my **strong support of HB 665**, “AN ACT to Increase Eligibility for Free School Meals to 300% of poverty ”- The proposed legislation is a win for New Hampshire's children, their teachers, school food service departments, parents, and the communities in which we live, play, learn, and work. I am sure that Chairperson Ladd's experiences as a teacher and principal provides insights into the untenable reality of trying to teach and maintain positive learning behaviors when children are hungry. We have data that supports food's importance

1. As noted, the Economic Benefits of Child Nutrition Report of August 2024 acknowledges that “ Good nutrition is a core part of child development, meaning that it both improves kids’ health and well-being during childhood while also supporting future academic and employment outcomes.
2. The 2021 [True Cost of School Meals Case Study Report](#) from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Center for Good Food Purchasing estimates that school meal programs provide, on a national basis \$40 billion annually in human health and economic benefits, a benefit that greatly exceeds the cost of \$18.7 billion to run them.
3. The [long-term](#) health consequences and decline in human capital caused by childhood hunger exceed these costs

Proposing free meals for children living in households at 300% poverty is an attempt to try to address the needs of our most vulnerable children and their families. Let's examine what 300% of poverty (\$ 79, 950) for a family of three look like in today's financial landscape. Below the Federal 300% of Federal Poverty Level is compared to cost of living estimates from MIT and Economic Policy Institute.

HHS 300% of Poverty Annual Income Family of Three	MIT Cost of Living Family of Three (2 Adults and 1 Child)	EPI Cost of Family Budget for Three (2 Adults and 1 Child)	MIT Cost of Living Family of Three (1 Adult, 2 Children)	EPI Cost of Family Budget for Three (1 Adult, 2 Children)
\$ 79, 950 *	97, 876**	97, 314***	111,700	112,754

* Federal Poverty Guidelines <https://www.medicaidplanningassistance.org/federal-poverty-guidelines/>

** MIT Living Wage Calculator for State of New Hampshire <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/33>

*** Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator. <https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/for-costs-of> Note: Manchester and Nashua averaged.

Note, the Federal Poverty level is by household size, not household composition. We can see from the chart provided, the 300% level provides support to households who would struggle without this assistance. Like textbooks and heat in the classroom, we need to have adequately nourished children if we want to have the full benefits of educating our youngest population. By providing meals in schools, we make it easier for children to learn, for teachers to teach, and for parents and caregivers to have sufficient funds for heating, housing, dental or medical care.

We have the data that says school meals work. Let's invest in our children and invest in our collective futures.

Please vote in favor of HB 665.

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of our children and their communities.

Sincerely,
Joanne Burke

References

1. The [Economic Benefits of Child Nutrition](#) Report . Senate Joint Economic Report Democrats. August 2024. Accessed February 6, 2025

2. The [True Cost of Food School Meals](#) Case Study. Rockefeller Foundation and Cener for Good Food Purchasing 2021
3. [Feeding Human Capital](#). Children's Health Research Brief. Healthwatch. Children's Medical Center, Boston Ma