



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

February 17, 2009

The Honorable Ruth Kagi, Chair
Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education
Washington State Senate
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Senator Kagi:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to thank you for scheduling a hearing Wednesday on Senate Bill 5361, a bill related to feeding hungry children through school breakfast and lunch programs, and, to the extent funding is provided, through summer food services programs. The Board has typically supported efforts to make school nutrition programs as robust as possible.

In 2006, 34 percent of children lived in families where no parent had full-time year round employment. In 2007, 15 percent of Washington children lived in poverty. In these times of rising unemployment, more families are likely to experience food insecurity or hunger.

Health effects of hunger and food insecurity in children are associated with having more psychosocial problems, frequent colds, ear infections, anemia, asthma, and frequent headaches. Childhood hunger and malnutrition are also associated with obesity later in life. When families are not able to obtain nutritious food, they typically develop unhealthy eating habits.

Feeding low-income children is critical on many fronts, including children's ability to perform well academically. Washington State Healthy Youth Survey data indicates that there is an association between not eating breakfast and academic risk. Studies of school breakfast programs show improvements to both nutrition and academic achievement. This is an important finding because level of educational attainment is one of the best long-term predictors of health.

The Board is mindful of the hard choices the Legislature faces in crafting a state budget during these difficult economic times. The free and reduced school lunch program is a federally funded program that the state has chosen to augment. Governor Christine Gregoire is to be commended for preserving current state funding for this program in her budget proposal. Although a fiscal note is not yet available, this bill would presumably drive a significant increase in the state's share of school nutrition programs by mandating a state-funded grant program. The grant program would eliminate breakfast copayments for all students eligible for reduce-priced school meals, as well as lunch copayments for eligible students who attend a school whose student body includes any student in preschool through sixth grade.

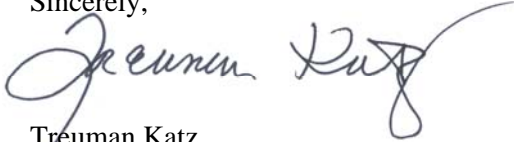
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The Board is not in a position to advise you on whether to pass this legislation because it is the Legislature's unenviable task, in consultation with the Governor, to weigh competing needs in the face of significant economic scarcity. I appreciate the opportunity to share the Board's policy perspectives on school nutrition programs, however, and to thank you for considering this important public health issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Treuman Katz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

Treuman Katz
Chair

cc: House Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education
The Honorable Pat Sullivan, Washington House of Representatives
Washington State Board of Health Members
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Mr. John Aultman, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Mr. Brian Peyton, Department of Health
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, Washington State Board of Health