

38TH DISTRICT  
STATE SENATOR  
**LINDSEY M. WILLIAMS**

SENATE BOX 203038  
THE STATE CAPITOL  
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-3038  
717-787-6538  
FAX: 717-787-8625

5000 MCKNIGHT ROAD • SUITE 405  
PITTSBURGH, PA 15237  
412-364-0469  
FAX: 412-364-0928

1826 UNION AVENUE  
NATRONA HEIGHTS, PA 15065  
724-224-2131  
FAX: 724-224-2145



## Senate of Pennsylvania

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EMAIL: [SenatorLindseyWilliams@pasenate.com](mailto:SenatorLindseyWilliams@pasenate.com)  
WEBSITE: [www.SenatorLindseyWilliams.com](http://www.SenatorLindseyWilliams.com)  
FACEBOOK: @SenWilliamsPA  
TWITTER: @SenWilliamsPA  
INSTAGRAM: @SenWilliamsPA

August 1, 2022

Governor Tom Wolf  
Office of the Governor  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Acting Secretary Eric Hagarty  
Department of Education  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126

### **Re: Temporary Free School Meals for Upcoming School Year**

Dear Governor Wolf and Acting Secretary Hagarty,

No one wants a child to go hungry or feel shame. School meals are as critical to learning as textbooks and teachers. Unfortunately, the School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania have brought to our attention that low-income students and families will once again need to pay for school meals in the upcoming school year. We urge this Administration to take whatever steps are in your power to temporarily extend access to free school breakfasts and lunches for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year.

#### Federal Action

Congressional waivers at the start of the pandemic gave schools relief from regulations and ensured that all students had access to breakfast and lunch – whether they were learning in person or remotely. Recently, Congress extended pandemic school meal waivers through the summer and provided supply chain flexibilities and increased federal reimbursements for schools through the 2022-23 school year.

While these changes help schools facing rising food, gas, and labor costs, the federal action unfortunately does little to help the students and families enduring the same financial strain.

Starting next school year, only students with a family income of 185% of the poverty level or below will once again qualify for free or reduced school meals. The end of the federal waivers will be especially difficult for families who fall just outside the USDA's income-eligibility guidelines. Additionally, some schools are being forced to raise meal prices, meaning that families who were paying before the pandemic will now pay more when the waivers expire.

The pandemic has showed us how students and educators benefit when school meals are free for all kids. With the challenges of the pandemic persisting and families facing higher costs across the board, now is not the time to take a step backwards.

State Level Policy

States around the country have recognized the need to take decisive action on school meals. This year's School Code took positive steps to addressing lunch shaming and ensuring families are enrolled in free and reduce meal programs. Other states have recognized the need to go further.

California and Maine have both passed their own universal free school meal programs. Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, and Vermont have proposed or passed universal free-lunch bills, and Colorado will have a proposal on the ballot in November, signaling a growing recognition for this change.

As members of the Senate Education committee, we are certainly supportive of a permanent, universal program happening legislatively. Unfortunately, the federal action that resulted in students needing to resume paying for meals did not occur until late June, too late for this issue to be including in the budget negotiations or benefit students in this upcoming school year.

Need for Emergency Administrative Action

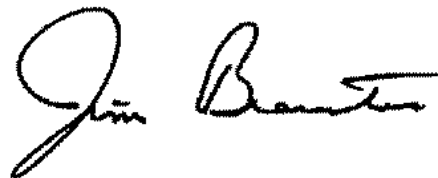
As a result, we urge you to use any power and funding at your disposal to take emergency action and temporarily cover the costs of school meals that are not already covered through the federal free and reduced-price-meal and Community Eligibility Provision programs for the 2022-2023 school year.

Given the ongoing pandemic and growing economic challenges facing Pennsylvania families - and to ensure every student is nourished and ready to learn - we strongly urge you to provide all students school meals at no charge for the upcoming school year.

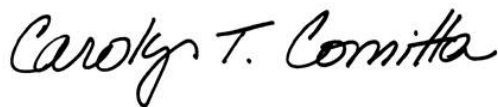
Respectfully,



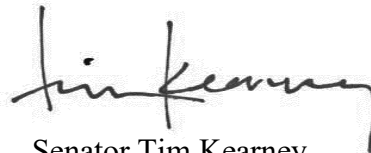
Senator Lindsey M. Williams  
Democratic Chair, Senate Education Committee  
38<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District



Senator Jim Brewster  
45<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District



Senator Carolyn T. Comitta  
19<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District



Senator Tim Kearney  
26<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District