

Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott ● Chairman

Opening Statement of Chair Suzanne Bonamici (OR-1), Subcommittee on Civil Rights & Human Services

Subcommittee on Civil Rights & Human Services Protections Hearing

Growing a Healthy Next Generation: Examining Federal Child Nutrition Programs

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

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We are here today to discuss our responsibility to make sure that all children have access to healthy food, all year long, in and out of the classroom, and to discuss why doing so is a good investment.

More than 70 years ago, Congress passed the National School Lunch Act as – and I quote – "a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children."

Through the enactment of this first federal child nutrition program, Congress recognized that feeding hungry children was a moral imperative and a vital tool to protect the health and security of our nation.

Kids, families, and communities all do better when kids have nutritious food that helps them learn, grown, and thrive. Studies have found that healthier students are likely to have fewer absences and disciplinary issues.

When children have consistent access to nutritious food, it improves their health and wellbeing from early childhood through adulthood. This, in turn, results in substantial long-term savings in health care and education.

Roughly 15 million households face food insecurity today. In my home state of Oregon, 1 in 5 kids live in a household where financial hardship makes it difficult to put food on the table. Child nutrition programs remain critical to preventing child hunger and setting a strong foundation for the next generation.

Today, child nutrition standards and programs – like the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program, and the Summer Food Service Program – provide healthy meals for more than 30 million children, in all 50 states, all throughout the year. In Oregon, nearly 300,000 students participated in the National School Lunch Program, and nearly 150,000 students participated in the School Breakfast program in school year 2017 to 2018.

These programs have historically enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress and in communities across the country. We know that many communities do face challenges in feeding their children, and as a Congress, we should do more – not less – to address these issues. Unfortunately, yesterday the President made clear he does not share these goals.

Under the president's budget proposal, roughly 1.3 million children would go without free school meals. That is a lot of hungry children. This hearing will be an opportunity for all Members to hear about why these programs are vital to the health and success of communities across the country – from Oregon to Kentucky and everywhere in between.

I hope this hearing is a first step toward renewing the historically bipartisan commitment to childhood nutrition, and I look forward to hearing more about these important programs. Congress and this Committee have a responsibility to make sure that every child has access to a quality education. Child nutrition programs are an

important part of making sure that education results in every child having the foundation for a healthy and productive future.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being with us today; I look forward to your testimony. I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Comer.