

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 1342

As Passed House:

February 12, 2021

Title: An act relating to eliminating lunch copays for students who qualify for reduced-price lunches.

Brief Description: Eliminating lunch copays for students who qualify for reduced-price lunches.

Sponsors: Representatives Berg, Gregerson, Berry, Wicks, Chopp, Valdez, Morgan, Sells, Fitzgibbon, Orwall, Santos, Ryu, Peterson, Rude, Maycumber, Shewmake, Stokesbary, Ormsby, Lovick, Stonier, Bergquist, Bateman, Lekanoff, Callan, Frame, Riccelli, Pollet and Harris-Talley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 2/2/21, 2/4/21 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/12/21, 95-1.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Eliminates lunch copays for students who qualify for reduced-price lunches under the National School Lunch Program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 30 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Caldier, Chandler, Chopp, Cody, Dolan, Fitzgibbon, Frame, Hansen, Harris, Jacobsen, Johnson, J., Lekanoff, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Springer, Steele, Stonier, Sullivan and Tharinger.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Dye and Hoff.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: James Mackison (786-7104).

Background:

Child Nutrition Programs.

The United States Department of Agriculture subsidizes several child nutrition programs, which the state administers to provide healthy food to children. The programs include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and the Special Milk Program. The NSLP and the SBP are federally assisted meal programs operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. The programs provide nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day.

Free and Reduced-Price Meals.

To qualify for free meals, a student's family income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. Students whose families have an income between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals (up to 40 cents per lunch). Students whose families earn more than 185 percent of the poverty level pay full price, but the meals in all cases are federally subsidized to some extent.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

Beginning with the 2021-22 school year, lunch copays for students qualifying for reduced-price lunches are eliminated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The bill removes copays for students in grades 4–12, in addition to students in grades 1–3 and breakfast copays already covered in the state budget. Nearly half of all

students are eligible for subsidized lunches. Food security was an issue before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unprecedented health crisis has exacerbated the problem, as demonstrated by long lines at food banks. While school meal volumes have dropped during COVID-19, schools have continued to play an important role in providing free meals to children.

A copay of 40 cents a day may not sound like much, but the costs add up over time and have a real impact for families facing food insecurity. For families that have lost jobs during the pandemic, covering a copay can cost as much as \$300 per year for multiple children without free programs like this bill or the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Families can use the money saved with this bill for other essential needs.

Students should not be stigmatized for needing support, and this is one more step in removing stigma. Covering all copays will reduce financial stress for families and improve academic performance by making sure all kids can receive a healthy lunch.

Many have worked on this issue for over a decade. The CEP and Breakfast After the Bell programs were good steps. Wider adoption of the CEP may reduce the cost of the bill, as it will reduce the number of copays that need to be covered.

Covering copays can also alleviate school lunch debt problems. Over one quarter, one district accumulated \$60,000 in lunch debt, which could be covered in part with the funding in this bill. Students should not be forced to decide whether to eat or add to their family's debt. Also, parents may feel stigma from participating in their child's education if lunch debt is hanging over them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that schools play a critical role in food security. Lunches have been free during the pandemic and will remain free until June 30, 2021. This support has helped greatly. It will be hard for these students to pay again once they return to school. The economy will not rebound immediately for all, and the need for this support is growing. Costs of returning to school should not fall on families most in need. We should support equity so that students can eat worry free. Increasing access to food programs in schools makes sense.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Berg, prime sponsor; Tonya Thomas, Kitsap Crossroads Rotary; Julie Salvi, Washington Education Association; Martha Rice, Washington State School Directors' Association and Yakima School Board; Sara Seelmeyer, United Way of King County; Yesenia Ramirez; Bob Cooper, National Association of Social Workers - Washington State Chapter; Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest; Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition; Mitch Denning, Megan de Vries, and Ariane Shanley, Washington School Nutrition Association; Leanne Eko, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Jewelle Harmon, Kent School District; and Aaron

Czyzewski, Food Lifeline.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.