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Title: A MOTION reaffirming the King County council's support of universal free school lunch programs, Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer programs, and other nutrition security programs.

Sponsors: Girmay Zahilay

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A MOTION reaffirming the King County council's support of universal free school lunch programs, Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer programs, and other nutrition security programs.

WHEREAS, children and youth benefitting from proper nourishment are better able to learn, participate, and achieve in an academic setting, and

WHEREAS, despite the availability of traditional means-tested school lunch programs, research shows millions of children and youth in the United States were not able to reliably access nutritious food, and

WHEREAS, one in eleven households in the western states of the United States struggled with food insecurity in 2020 according to the United States Department of Agriculture, and

WHEREAS, nearly 10% of households with children in the Seattle/Tacoma/Bellevue metropolitan area experienced food insecurity in late July through early August 2022, according to the Public Health - Seattle & King County data dashboard on Food Insecurity, and

WHEREAS, traditional means-tested school lunch programs rely on a burdensome application process, which may result in delays in application processing, and present language barriers to prospective participants, and

WHEREAS, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control, children who participate in school meal programs are more likely to consume more whole grains, milk, fruits, and vegetables during mealtimes and have better overall diets, and

WHEREAS, The Centers for Disease Control further indicates that students eating breakfast at school is associated with better student attendance rates, fewer missed school days, and better test scores, and

WHEREAS, universal school lunch programs reduce social stigma among students and increase student participation in school services, and

WHEREAS, universal school lunch programs reduce program-related administrative overhead, removing the need for application processing and income verification, management of separate free and paid lunch tickets, and collection activities for unpaid balances, and

WHEREAS, universal school lunch programs provide a social benefit to families of all incomes, ensuring all children have consistent access to a minimum of two free, nutritious meals a day at school, and

WHEREAS, just as families with school-aged children are experiencing inflation-driven increases in food costs, millions of children across the country are losing access to free school meals due to the expiration of COVID relief programs, and

WHEREAS, the Community Eligibility Provision is a national program that has transformed school breakfast and lunch for children, families, and schools, by allowing high-needs schools to offer free school meals for all students, and

WHEREAS, when schools close for the summer break, millions of families lose access to school meals and food insecurity among families with children goes up, and

WHEREAS, Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer programs provide families an Electronic Benefit

Transfer card to purchase food when schools are closed, and

WHEREAS, the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer program provided vital summer nutrition assistance to 660,000 Washington state children in 2020-2021, and

WHEREAS, current economic conditions and the expiration of COVID assistance programs makes these Electronic Benefit Transfer programs more vital than ever, and

WHEREAS, increasing eligibility and flexibility for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program would help ensure that all people have access to basic nutritious food, reduce inequality, and enhance social stability and well-being, and

WHEREAS, nutrition security programs provide a critical safety net to ensure that all those in our community, state, and nation have access to support for food security, the most basic of human needs;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

- A. The council affirms its support for expanding food security programs to the level necessary to ensure that all residents, regardless of income or status, have access to nutritious food, and
- B. The council affirms its support for increasing food security for students and their families through universal free school lunch programs and summer Electronic Benefit Transfer programs, and
- C. The council calls on our congressional partners to combat food insecurity for students and their families by:
 1. Allowing schools to continue offering free meals to all students through the 2022-2023 school year,
 2. Expanding the Community Eligibility Provision program for the 2023-2024 school year and beyond by increasing reimbursement, making more schools eligible, and creating a statewide option, allowing Washington to offer free meals to all students, and
 3. Passing the Stop Child Hunger Act of 2021, or its successor, that creates a nationwide Electronic Benefit Transfer card program that provides families an Electronic Benefit Transfer card to purchase food when schools are closed, and

D. The council calls on our congressional partners to combat food insecurity by expanding the eligibility for, and flexibility of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by:

1. Removing the three-month benefit time limit for certain working age adults, and
2. Increasing access to the program for low-income college students to promote degree completion,
and
3. Expanding access to the program for eligible green card holders legally in this country, and
4. Broadening access for hot prepared foods, and
5. Raising benefit levels to more adequately cover the cost of food, especially during the ongoing
period of high inflation.