

January 16, 2024

The Honorable Rick Ladd, Chair
House Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 205
33 North State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Re: New Futures' testimony in support of House Bill 1212 (relative to eligibility for free school meals)

Dear Representative Ladd and Honorable Members of the Committee:

New Futures appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1212 (relative to eligibility for free school meals). New Futures is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to solve New Hampshire's problems through policy change. In this role, we work extensively with policy makers, health care providers and families to increase access to quality, affordable health care and to improve health equity across the Granite State.

New Futures stands in strong support of HB 1212 as it would increase access to consistent, healthy food for children in need across the Granite State. Time and again, research has shown that free- or reduced-price school lunch has improved health and educational outcomes for students and families in need. Recent data from the Food Resource & Action Center shows that participation in free school meal programs reduces food insecurity, obesity rates and poor health among participating students¹. Access to school meals improves attendance rates, as well as student behavior. This not only leads to stronger student performance, but greater educational attainment over the long-term, boosting the financial health of our state.

At a time when Granite State families are facing great economic challenges, HB 1212 would help to expand access to school meals by increasing eligibility to families earning up to 350 percent of the federal poverty level (\$87,010 for a family of four; \$69,020 for two). This would go far to address child hunger, to improve health and strengthen the future of many of our most vulnerable children and families. For the health of these children and our state as a whole, we ask that you support this bill and vote it Ought to Pass. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,



Jake Berry
Vice President of Policy
New Futures

¹Food Resource & Action Center, [School Meals Are Essential for Student Health and Learning](#), May 2021