

Subject: Support SB 1363 and SB 1473, the “Thrive Act”.

To the Honorable Governor J. Kevin Stitt and Members of the Oklahoma State Legislature:

We the undersigned are writing to respectfully request your support for Senate Bills 1363 and 1473, also known as the Thrive Act, a proposal that aims to expand access to no-cost school meals and strengthen local economies and food systems. Nearly 70% of Oklahomans, across the political spectrum, agree: all families should have access to free school meals.

Oklahoma families continue to struggle as high food-price inflation persists. The 2022 USDA Household Food Security Report shows that childhood food insecurity continues to increase while many expanded support programs have ended. These trends demonstrate there is a heightened need among Oklahoma families, and we believe supporting the Thrive Act is the response to ensure the well-being of Oklahoma children while also supporting schools and local economies.

The Thrive Act proposes a critical initiative – offering a state-funded meal cost reimbursement to schools with a high percentage of low-income students and assisting schools across the state, rural and urban, to access more federal dollars. This legislation also creates a state investment in farm-to-school grants and directs the Oklahoma State Department of Education to evaluate impact, implementing processes to track student food security, academic performance, and overall well-being.

Many Oklahoma schools have expressed interest in providing no-cost meals to their students but have faced funding barriers. Expanding access to no-cost meals has been linked to a 13.5% increase in federal meals funding. This legislation is structured to empower school districts of all sizes to maximize both the reach and cost efficiency of school meal programs.

The impacts of no-cost school meals programs are profound and far-reaching. Research consistently demonstrates the positive effects of proper nutrition on student health, well-being, academic performance, and attendance. The Thrive Act will also strengthen local economies by bringing in more federal funds to support local producers, support and maintain jobs in Oklahoma, and ensure children can learn and thrive when they join the workforce.

We, a coalition of Oklahomans, believe in the positive potential the Thrive Act has for transforming the outlook for children, education, and food systems in our state. Proper nutrition is essential for student health, well-being, academic performance, attendance, and our economy. We strongly urge you to support this legislation and invest in programs that will be transformative for children, students, and the future of all Oklahomans.