#0445

Sponsor:

Council Member Harlee

WHEREAS, House Bill 125 (HB 125), An Act to Amend Title 14 of the Delaware Code Relating to Free School Meals would require all public schools to offer only students who qualify for a reduced-price meal, under the federal School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program, a free breakfast and lunch every school day; and

WHEREAS, when the USDA School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program were required to return to pre-pandemic policies after waivers for free lunch expired on June 30, 2022, evidence emerged that there was an ongoing need for support for student meals. The Wilmington City Council recognizes the urgent necessity of addressing economic disparities among its residents. In New Castle County, the child food insecurity rate is 13.5 percent. Within the City of Wilmington, households experience a poverty rate of 24.3 percent; and

WHEREAS, access to healthy meals contributes to student health, well-being, and academic achievement. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) have identified healthy eating habits cultivated in schools with the establishment of lifelong dietary practices. The provision of meals in schools has been shown to mitigate food insufficiency by as much as 14 percent. Furthermore, studies indicate that consistent access to nutritious meals can impact behavioral outcomes. School meals have been linked to reductions in out-of-school suspensions by up to 25 percent in counties with high rates of food insecurity; and

WHEREAS, it is crucial to recognize that some families in Wilmington may just exceed the free lunch threshold, yet still face economic challenges. These families may struggle to provide their children with nutritious meals, impacting their ability to thrive in school.

Therefore, ensuring all students have access to healthy free lunch regardless of their family's income level is essential to fostering educational equity and supporting the well-being of all students; and

WHEREAS, the cost of living has increased substantially in the post-pandemic economy. Households continue to struggle to acquire basic necessities, including nutritious food options. Assuring access to healthy meals for young, developing minds during school hours would contribute significantly to the long-term health of students and provide much-needed relief for households in the City of Wilmington and the State of Delaware that are still recovering from the economic hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, Wilmington faces disproportionately high rates of childhood poverty and food insecurity compared to other parts of Delaware, exacerbating the challenges faced by families in providing adequate nutrition for their children. According to the Delaware Academy of Medicine, Wilmington has the highest rates of poverty for children under 18 in Delaware at 41%, highlighting the urgent need to address these disparities and ensure that all students have equal access to nutritious meals to support their academic success and overall well-being.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WILMINGTON, that this Legislative body urges the honorable members of the Delaware General Assembly to support House Bill 125, An Act to Amend Title 14 of the Delaware Code Relating to Free School Meals.

BE IT RESOLVED, that this Legislative body expresses strong favor for House Bill 125, An Act to Amend Title 14 of the Delaware Code Relating to Free School Meals, which is in

alignment with the Wilmington City Council's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan goal of maintaining

a "Healthy Wilmington" for all residents.

Passed by City Council,

ATTEST:_____
City Clerk

SYNOPSIS: This Resolution urges the Delaware General Assembly to pass House Bill 125, An Act to Amend Title 14 of the Delaware Code Relating to Free School Meals, which will alleviate financial burdens of households with school-aged children and combat food insecurity by ensuring free and nutritional school meals for public school students in the City of Wilmington and in the State of Delaware.