

March 14th, 2022

Representative Ruth Richardson
403 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: HF1729

Dear Chair Richardson and Committee Members,

On behalf of Allina Health, I am writing to express our strong support of HF1729, which would provide free school lunches to students regardless of their income.

Allina Health is a fully integrated health system operating across the Twin Cities, central and southern Minnesota, including 11 hospitals and 90+ clinics. As a not-for-profit health system, we partner and give back to the community in many different ways—all focused on improving the health of those we serve. One of those ways is through a partnership with the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and their Accountable Health Communities (AHC) agreement.

Every person who walks through Allina Health doors brings with them unique life experiences that may impact their health. This is why we focus on caring for the whole person, looking at an individual's physical needs as well as social needs. In 2021, as part of the AHC, Allina Health care teams in 79 sites screened patients with Medicare and/or Medicaid insurance for five health-related social needs. In all, Allina Health teams completed 266,948 screenings in 2021. The most commonly identified need? Food insecurity.

Thanks to temporary federal relief, a growing number of students across the state have been able to access school breakfast and lunch. During this time, families haven't had to worry about meeting rigid low-income guidelines or whether it's more cost-effective to pack meals, and their students have been able to access the stigma-free nourishment that is vital to learning. Unfortunately, this aid is set to expire at the end of the 2022 school year, but the need will still be there. Right now, approximately 1 in 4 food-insecure kids come from a household that doesn't qualify for financial support.

At Allina Health, we believe health care is more than just treating people when they are sick. We are committed to improving the health of the communities we serve and helping people live healthier lives. This is why we support HF1729. Ensuring that students have access to two free and healthy meals a day will help ease the burden on families experiencing food insecurity, and will lead more students to lead happier and healthier lives.

Thank you for your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aimee Pappenfus".

Aimee Pappenfus
Director System Community Engagement, Community Benefit & Engagement
Allina Health