



**Testimony of Anna Korsen, Full Plates Full Potential
In Support of LD 258**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Anna Korsen, Advocacy and Implementation Director with [Full Plates Full Potential](#), a statewide non-profit working to address childhood food insecurity by providing technical and financial assistance to schools and communities to help feed kids now, while advocating for the systemic changes necessary to ensure that all Maine children have consistent access to nutritious meals. Our strategy is to maximize access to USDA Child Nutrition Programs - commonly known as school lunch, school breakfast, afterschool meals, and summer meals.

Today, we're submitting testimony in support of LD 258. We want to thank Governor Mills for her commitment to Maine's children in her budget proposal and the important investment to feed every child at school.

Thanks to the leadership of Governor Mills and Senate President Jackson, and the broad bipartisan support of the 130th Legislature, Maine made history last session by becoming one of the first states in the nation to pass a law to permanently provide school meals at no cost to all students. This proposed budget continues that commitment to Maine's future.

Maine has the highest rate of childhood food insecurity in New England, with [1 in 6 kids](#) lacking consistent access to nutrition. For many students, school meals are the only reliable source of food and the most nutritious meals they receive. However, prior to Maine's policy to give every child access to school breakfast and lunch at no cost, school meals were the only part of the school day that some kids were expected to pay for. Charging for a meal at school meant that many children didn't eat due to [stigma](#), restrictive income guidelines and unnecessary bureaucracy.

We know that a hungry child can't learn, and studies show that school meals [enhance child development and school readiness](#) and [support learning, attendance, and behavior](#). School meals also provide critical nutrition for developing children. A recent study found that [school meals are the healthiest meals that many children have](#). Additionally, they [improve child health and wellness](#). Providing school meals for all children at no cost helps to advance equity in our schools and supports food access for Black, Indigenous and students of color who experience food insecurity at much [higher rates](#) than their white peers. And ultimately, childhood food insecurity results in [high costs to society](#) so investing in School Meals for All makes fiscal sense.



Maine's historic School Meals for All policy is already having a positive impact on Maine students and schools. Preliminary numbers from the Maine Department of Education show an increase in school meal participation compared to the pre-Covid fall of 2019. So far this school year, the number of total students eating lunch everyday has increased by 16% and the total number of students eating breakfast everyday has increased by 23%. This demonstrates that the stigma surrounding participation in school meals is beginning to go away. We're also hearing reports from some schools that more students with full bellies has caused a reduction in hunger related visits to the school nurse and fewer behavior disruptions in classrooms.

Alongside California and Colorado, Maine is leading the nation by ensuring that no child goes hungry at school ever again, and the momentum is picking up across the country. At least 24 other states are working on similar legislation. We continue to advocate for the expansion of federally funded free school meals, but until that happens Maine's investment in School Meals for All kids is critical. States will need to lead the way and demonstrate to Congress and the USDA that School Meals for All should become a permanent federal policy.

We thank you for your continued support of this important policy, and urge the committee to pass this budget with the inclusion of \$55 million in funding for School Meals for All. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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