

5 April 2023

## **131st Maine Legislature's Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

### **LD 1128: An Act to Address Student Hunger and Nutrition Through Expanded Access to Free Milk in Schools**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee On education and Cultural Affairs,

As a Maine mum, dairy farmer, rural advocate, and active participant in our food systems battling food insecurity I find myself in the awkward position of opposing a bill that on its face would put more sustainable nutrition in the bellies of our future: schoolchildren.

Unfortunately, I am in the position of having to ask you to choose OUGHT NOT TO PASS regarding LD 1128: An Act to Address Student Hunger and Nutrition Through Expanded Access to Free Milk. I understand the urge to feel that a program providing milk to ALL students would be helpful and impactful, and no doubt there are some instances where this would make the provision of meals easier, but...

- the nature of School Nutrition Programs does actually already allow for students to access milk, without purchase, by also choosing 2 other components of the school meal.
- while the logistics of explaining the requirements to receive milk free may be a hurdle for some programs the fact remains that ALL students may receive milk for free, even if they bring their own lunch, simply by also choosing 2 other components (fruit, vegetable, grain, protein) to go along with the meal they may have brought with them. (and many schools have give and take tables that ensure that food that is not eaten can be shared fro someone else so there isn't waste)
- the ability of School Nutrition Providers to be able to order and distribute milk to those who choose to add milk to their outside meal may be present additional burdens to staff and programs that are already incredibly overburdened. Ensuring that alternatives are available for those who are lactose intolerant or unable to include dairy in their diet would be a logistical challenge as well.
- who is this proposal serving? Are the students bringing their own meals facing food insecurity and will requiring schools to provide those students free milk be allocating resources in a way that lessens food insecurity? And if so, wouldn't the actual utilization of the program in place where these students need only choose two more food items and milk be a better solution...or rather, is the solution in place?

While I completely appreciate the struggles of our school nutrition providers to work under budget constraints and multiple layers of stress and pressures in order to make sure that our school children are well nourished I also appreciate that the program in place provides the solution to the problems being encountered. By encouraging students to choose additional meal components, including milk, to accompany their meals from home there is an inherent increase in healthy food for the student. In instances where there is concern regarding possible food waste then practices and policies are implemented to mitigate food waste such as give and take tables.

As a dairy farmer it is very uncomfortable to be in a position that is not promoting MORE milk on the table, but as a dairy farmer who is very concerned about sustainability, nutrition, and food insecurity and involved in related work and efforts. However, I am certain that the true issue of food insecurity and increased nutrition for school children is not being answered here in this proposed legislation and I am convinced that the program we have is the solution and that the way we approach nourishing our children is capable of adapting to the needs of those who bring their own meals to school.

Thank you for time and energy as Citizen Legislators.

With Gratitude,

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