



**Testimony of Colleen Foley-Ingersoll, M.Ed., BCBA, MaineHealth  
In Support of LD 776, “An Act to Provide Free School Lunches to  
Special Purpose Private Schools That Receive Students from the Public  
School System”  
Monday, Mar 31, 2024**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, please accept this written testimony in support of LD 776, “An Act to Provide Free School Lunches to Special Purpose Private Schools That Receive Students from the Public School System.”

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. As part of our vision of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” MaineHealth, which includes MaineHealth Behavioral Health, is committed to creating a seamless system of behavioral healthcare across Maine, coordinating hospital psychiatric care with community-based treatment services, as well as residential treatment, and providing better access to behavioral healthcare through integration with primary care.

The Glickman Lauder Center of Excellence in Autism and Developmental Disorders (GLCOE), which serves individuals and their families through a continuum of care, including Early Intervention, Preschool, and K-12 programs. Our preschool and K-12 schools are private, Department of Education-approved institutions that serve children with autism and other developmental disorders.

GLCOE serves as a placement option for public school districts when a child’s needs cannot be met within their local district. While GLCOE works closely with public schools, we are not part of the public school system. When a student requires an out-of-district placement, their Individual Education Plan (IEP) team may determine that GLCOE is the most suitable option for meeting the student’s needs. This opportunity for a more tailored and specialized education can significantly enhance a child’s learning, however, such a placement may result in the student losing access to certain opportunities provided by their local school district, including school meals.

Maine ranks 9th in the nation for food insecurity with 14.4% of Maine households being insecure. That equates to 1 in every 5 children. This highlights the significant burden that food insecurity places on families, particularly in the context of a specialized educational setting like GLCOE. To support these families, we advocate for expanding access to federally and state-funded child nutrition programs, to improve health equity across Maine.

Currently, GLCOE spends approximately \$500 per month to provide food to our students, including breakfast, lunch, and snacks. This includes providing full meals to some students and

supplementing meals for others. We are currently working to partner with Westbrook School Department to offer meals that meet the National School Lunch Program standards. However, the cost per meal will be higher than the reimbursement rate, resulting in GLCOE incurring additional cost at approximately \$0.40 per student per lunch and \$0.25 per student per breakfast.

In closing, children in out of district placement deserve to have the same access to state-funded child nutrition programs. I urge you to support the legislation before you today.

Thank you,

Colleen Foley-Ingersoll  
Senior Director of the Developmental Disorders Services at Maine Behavioral Healthcare