



March 30, 2025

Re: LD 776, An Act to Provide Free School Lunches to Special Purpose Private Schools That Receive Students from the Public School System

To: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

The Maine Chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (MC-FFRF) writes in SUPPORT of LD 776.

Access to nutritious meals is a fundamental part of ensuring that students are able to learn in the classroom. School lunches have long been recognized as a vital component of a child's daily well-being, promoting not only physical health but also academic success. In Maine, the expansion of free school lunch programs to special purpose private schools is a much-needed step in creating a more equitable educational environment for all students.

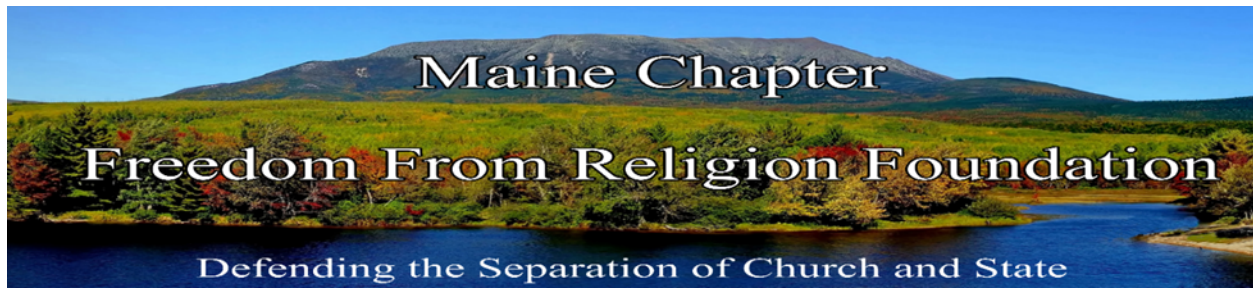
Special purpose private schools provide the specialized support that their students need to succeed. However, students in these schools may face additional challenges when it comes to accessing adequate nutrition. Many families of children attending these schools may be from lower-income backgrounds. Children from low-income families are often disproportionately affected by food insecurity. This can lead to poor nutrition, which in turn impacts cognitive development, academic performance, and overall health. By providing free school lunches to students in special purpose private schools, Maine can help eliminate this barrier to success for many children who may not otherwise have access to nutritious food during the school day.

Children with special needs may face additional challenges when it comes to nutrition. Many students in these schools have unique medical or behavioral conditions that can make food insecurity and poor nutrition even more damaging. Children who have access to healthy meals are better able to concentrate and engage in the learning process. Nutritional meals also improve overall behavior and emotional well-being, which are crucial in a school environment, particularly in special purpose private schools where students may already face additional behavioral or emotional challenges.

Free school lunches in special purpose private schools would ensure that every student has the support needed to succeed in the classroom. No child should have to worry about when or where they will get their next meal, especially when that worry can interfere with their ability to learn and thrive. Special purpose private schools often serve children who may face challenges that are

Maine Chapter, Freedom From Religion Foundation
PO Box 161
Vassalboro, ME 04989-0161

President.RV@ffrfmaine.org
phone: 207-370-8813
www.ffrfmaine.org



not always addressed in traditional public school settings. For these students, access to free school lunches can be an important step in creating an environment where all students have the opportunity to succeed.

One of the major challenges faced by families and students who experience food insecurity is the stigma that often accompanies it. Children who do not have access to enough food may feel embarrassed or ashamed, which can further hinder their ability to succeed academically and socially. Providing free school lunches to students in special purpose private schools can help reduce this stigma, as all students would receive the same support and care. This can be especially important in special purpose private schools, where students may already be dealing with challenges related to their disabilities or needs. By ensuring that every student receives a meal, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive environment where all students are treated equally.

The positive impact on educational outcomes could have long-term benefits for the state as a whole. When children are well-nourished, they are more likely to stay engaged in school, graduate, and become productive members of society. Investing in free school lunches for special purpose private schools is an investment in Maine's future—one that benefits not only the children in these schools but also the broader community.

This is not just a matter of providing food—it is about investing in the well-being and future success of every child, regardless of their background or challenges. Maine's commitment to education should include ensuring that every student, in every setting, has the resources they need to succeed. Providing free school lunches to special purpose private schools is a necessary and positive step toward achieving this goal.

For these reasons, the MC-FFRF urges the committee to vote "OUGHT TO PASS" for LD 776. Thank you for your time and consideration.

-Ray Vensel, President