

Jonah Fertig-Burd  
DURHAM  
LD 577

Testimony of Jonah Fertig-Burd, Celebration Tree Farm & Wellness Center, Durham, Maine

In Support of LD 577

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Jonah Fertig-Burd. I am a farmer and a father of a High School Junior at Freeport High School.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 577 "An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program". I'd like to thank Senator Tipping for his commitment to school meals in Maine.

As a father, I know that my son can always access food at school, just as he can access education and extracurricular activities. Food is essential and providing all students with equal access food should be considered a basic right of our educational system. As a farmer, I see how the Universal School meals and other programs that work to support increased purchasing from local farms can help support our farm economy in Maine. With so many threats to farmers, we need to do everything we can to support this heritage industry in Maine.

During the 2023/2024 school year, over \$968,000 was spent on local foods by Maine schools!

School Meals for All has freed up school nutrition professionals from chasing lunch money and paperwork, giving them more time to:

- Develop creative menus and focus on what they're serving to kids

- Build relationships with local farms and source and serve more local food

- Engage more deeply with students and be responsive to students' dietary needs and preferences

- Focus on providing culturally important foods that reflect the diversity of Maine's students

- Develop their culinary skills through trainings and professional development opportunities

Thank you for your support for this bill and helping all Maine children have access to healthy food.

Jonah Fertig-Burd  
Durham, Maine