



**Testimony of Curtis Manchester, Oxford Hills School District, South Paris, 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 Curtis Manchester. I am the Food Service Director at Oxford Hills School District.

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.

I have been the Food Service Director in Oxford Hill School District for two years, but I worked in Child Nutrition for school districts in Maine for ten years in total. I have seen the positive impact that federal funding and universal free meals have had on the children in multiple school districts in Maine. We feed many students who don't receive consistent or healthy offerings of food at home. For many students, the food they eat at school is the best chance they have for consistent and healthy meals. Oxford Hills, in particular, has many students and families who would not be able to afford lunches if they were not subsidized by federal and state funding.

I understand there is a cost to providing "free" meals to students, and I understand budgets and funding are being cut for many programs in our state and country, but I think feeding children should be of the highest priority when looking at ways to spend funding. Maine has led the country as a positive example of funding universal free meals, and the impact has been astounding.

I strongly urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that children in Maine schools can eat at no cost to them. I would like to thank the co-chairs and committee for your time and commitment to Maine's children and for considering supporting this bill.

Curtis Manchester
Food Service Director
Oxford Hills School District