



Testimony of Kristen Dunphey, Portland, ME 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 Kristen Dunphey, as a parent and constituent from Portland.

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've worked in the school meals space for nearly a decade and my kiddo will enter kindergarten at Amanda C. Rowe Elementary school in Portland in September 2025. From both a professional and personal perspective, I could not be more proud to live in a state committed to supporting its children.

On its surface, this policy is about the state's budget. BUT at its core, this policy is about feeding kids. We know that children cannot learn, grow, or thrive on an empty stomach. School meals are often the most reliable source of nutrition for thousands of children in Maine. For many students, especially those from income-constrained households, breakfast and lunch at school may be their only consistent meals each day.

Making these meals available to all students removes a major barrier to participation by reducing the stigma associated with school meals. When only some students receive free meals, it can create shame or embarrassment—leading kids to skip meals altogether. A universal approach normalizes access, promotes dignity, and ensures no child is singled out based on their family's economic standing.

This policy is also a smart investment in our local economy. School meal programs purchase fresh food from local farms and suppliers, supporting agriculture and small businesses. Additionally, LD 577 will ensure school districts maximize federal reimbursements to reduce the financial burden carried by the State.

Lastly, when kids eat school meals, they're bellies are full and they're more engaged in the classroom. This sets them up for long-term academic success and reduces future healthcare costs, likely reducing long-term reliance on public benefits.



If we do not take meaningful steps now to protect School Meals for All, countless families and the local economy could be harmed. Protecting School Meals for All should be a no brainer. It supports families, strengthens communities, and most importantly—ensures that every child is fed.

I urge you to support this bill to protect our children and their futures. Thank you for your time and commitment to Maine's children.

Kristen Dunphey
Portland, ME