



**Testimony of Kate Patterson, Ocean Avenue Elementary School, Portland Public Schools, South Portland  
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 Katherine Patterson. I have been a special education Ed. Tech III for a little over 10 years at Ocean Avenue Elementary School in Portland, Maine.

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.

The School Meals for All bill that Governor Mills signed on July 1, 2021 ensured that students I work with are guaranteed free healthy meals. Many of the special education students I work with come from low income families that cannot provide consistent meals or healthy meals for them. This bill has made it so they are consistently getting fruit, vegetables, and protein to help them have full bellies ready to learn. Dr. Claire McCarthy, Senior Faculty Editor of Harvard Health Publishing said,

*"For many families, it's not that they choose not to eat these foods — it's that they can't afford them. Meats, fish, and fresh vegetables can be expensive."*

Having access to free and healthy meals is something that every child deserves as their brain is developing. Hungry children cannot access their learning. Schools have always been a space that aids in children's social, cognitive, and emotional development. To do this they need healthy nourishment, which the School Means for All bill has provided.

There have been proposed cuts from the federal level that are threatening the stability of School Meals for All. LD 577 would help to strengthen what Governor Mills already passed in Maine. This bill, if passed, would ensure that students that come from low income families will be promised free meals at school. It would also promote equity so the kids that could pay for the meal are not asking the students that can't pay why they are receiving a free meal. It lessens the stigma of coming from a lower income



background. Our state has the highest child food insecurity rate in New England. It's 1 in 5 children with 40% not being eligible for school meals. Passing LD 577 would strengthen Schools Meals for All, especially with what seems like federal cuts coming down the line.

Please support this bill to keep our young Mainers fed and nourished so that they may learn and grow. I would like to thank the co-chairs and committee for their time and commitment to Maine's children.

Sincerely,

Kate Patterson

Portland Public Schools, South Portland