

Lauren Bateman
Washington, ME
LD 577

Testimony of Lauren Bateman of Washington, 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 Lauren Bateman, I am a resident of Washington, ME.

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 work in international humanitarian response, and have for twenty years. I have seen the devastating effects of chronic hunger in many different contexts, and support any and all efforts to prevent childhood hunger and food insecurity here in Maine.

Maine has the highest rate of child food insecurity in New England, with 1 in 5 kids in Maine experiencing food insecurity. Despite this, 40% are not eligible for school meals. Studies have shown that School Meals for All increases participation in school meals and reduces the stigma associated with receiving a "free lunch" by making school meals a valued part of the school day for all students.

School meals also support local farms; during the 2023/2024 school year, over \$968,000 was spent on local foods by Maine schools, keeping the money spent on school meals in our state.

I would like to ask the committee to support this bill because it helps the children of Maine get the most out of their education. I want to thank the co-chairs and the entire committee for your time and commitment to Maine's children. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Lauren Bateman
Washington, ME