



**Testimony of Malia Demers on behalf of FoodCorps Maine,
Resident of New Sharon, 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 Malia Demers and I am the Student Impact Lead at FoodCorps 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".

In my work, I have been a food educator and now worked closely with school staff to help schools reach their goals around creating nourishing school meals and hands-on food education. Through this, I have experienced how foundational food is for children, and yet 1 in 5 kids in Maine experience food insecurity, and [40% are not eligible for school meals](#). Without a healthy breakfast and lunch students are stuck in fight or flight and unable to focus on their main job at school: Growth. And similarly, due to School Meals for All, School Nutrition Programs have begun to come out of the fight or flight many were in. Since School Meals for All has begun, nutrition professionals no longer have to spend countless hours chasing parents down for money. We don't ask teachers to get payment from parents for their child's education, and have their program suffer when parents can't pay, and we shouldn't ask that of school nutrition staff either. Additionally, school food programs have seen a 25% increase in student participation since School Meals for All which allows the food programs to become more financially stable and able to re-invest into our local economies. During the 2023/2024 school year, Maine schools spent \$968,000 on local foods!

When things aren't an emergency and when basic needs are met, children and school meal programs alike can innovate and grow, which creates a stronger, more prosperous community and state. School Meals for All has laid a critical foundation for success. I implore you to please pass LD 577 "An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program". Thank you for your time.

Malia Demers | FoodCorps

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