

**Testimony of Jeanne Lapointe, RSU #10 Rumford  
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 Jeanne LaPointe. I am the School Nutrition Director at RSU #10.

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 come to you today to speak to this bill as a lifelong Mainer, born in Rumford, having served the community of Rumford in the work of Nutrition for over 45 years. I am proud to continue that work as I lean into my final years of employment. I come from family who had the health of their community in mind; my grandmother represented her town of Upton as the representative in the formation of the "new" Rumford Community Hospital with the understanding that it took a village to keep us safe and healthy.

When RSU #10 decided to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision, it began to change how students, parents, teachers and Administrators thought about school meals and the environmental changes in our schools. No longer was the cafeteria seen as the place where "the poor kids went to eat", now food was there for all.

Unfortunately, we were unable to offer this provision in all schools in RSU #10, so the stigma, the unpaid lunch bills, the shame of not having funds to put on account continued. Free meals for all here in Maine helped get us over the hurdle to offer all students the same benefit of Universal Meals. Families do not have to worry about paying for a bus ride or a laptop, they should not have to worry about food access, this should be part of the school experience.

We in RSU #10 realize we are the sole source of food. Many of our children go home on weekends and food access is limited. Monday is a good day for many of our children as they know they can count on that first meal of the day, served in their classrooms, hallways or even second chance breakfast; all research based practices



for expanding our reach to meet our students where and when they are ready for food. Food Insecurity in our state is measured at one in 5 children, in our community; it is closer to 4 out of 5 children.

Participation in the CEP provision reduces the administrative burden of collecting Free and Reduced Meal applications and allows increased focus on producing locally procured scratch meals. The continuance and support of LD577 is critical for schools, and families. Additionally, Farmers and food producers in our communities benefit from relationships with schools and their purchasing power created from this legislation.

The children of this great State deserve the opportunity to thrive, school meals for All creates this opportunity

I wish to thank the committee for reading this testimony and your commitment to our children.

Jeanne LaPointe

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