



## Testimony of Abigale Razo, LCSW, 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 Abigale Razo, and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker working with school-aged youth in Knox County. I am writing to express my strong support for **LD 577: "An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program."** I would also like to thank Senator Tipping for his continued commitment to ensuring access to school meals for children across Maine.

This bill is critically important to our community. The young people I work with face a wide range of stressors every day—academic pressures, social challenges, and mental health concerns, to name a few. Worrying about where their next meal will come from should not be one of them.

Research consistently shows that access to nutritious school meals positively impacts child development, academic performance, attendance, and overall behavior. Yet, Maine currently has the highest rate of child food insecurity in New England. One in five children in our state experiences food insecurity, and 40% of them are not eligible for federally subsidized school meals.

In Knox County alone, 1,240 children are food insecure, according to *Map the Meal Gap* by Feeding America. While 82% of these children meet income eligibility for federal nutrition programs, potential cuts at the federal level place this support at risk. Universal access to school meals is a vital safeguard against these uncertainties and a necessary investment in the health and well-being of our youth.

It is in the best interest of Maine's children that this committee support LD 577. Guaranteeing access to school meals is not only a practical solution—it is a compassionate and forward-thinking one.

Thank you for your time, and for your commitment to the children and families of Maine.

Sincerely,

**Abigale Razo, LCSW**

Washington, Maine