

## **Testimony of Alisa Roman Director of Nutrition and Transportation for Lewiston Public Schools, Resident of Gardiner Maine 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 Alisa Roman. I am the Director of Nutrition and Transportation at Lewiston Public Schools.

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 am here to uplift the voices of my community and share the continued success stories that come from working in a district that has prioritized the basic right of its students to have the nourishment they need to thrive academically and socially.

Since 2015, Lewiston Public Schools has been able to serve all students free of charge through the Community Eligibility Provision. The results have been nothing short of remarkable.

Students eat without fear of stigma or bullying related to meal cost. They receive healthy meals and are given real choices. In the early years of implementation, teachers shared noticeable improvements in attendance and classroom engagement. Trips to the nurse due to hunger-related stomach issues decreased significantly, and conversations about food and wellness became more common and inclusive.

The idea that we might lose this ability to serve all students is incredibly discouraging. Without universal meals, students may avoid trying new, healthy foods or limit their choices to what they can afford. And let's face it—a bag of potato chips might get a sixth grader through part of the afternoon, but a full, balanced meal gives them the energy to learn all day.

Because of universal meals, we've expanded our programs to include after-school suppers, and we work with community partners like Tree Street Youth to feed students in their programs. Not only has School Meals for All nourished students, it has also supported 75 dedicated Nutrition Workers in Lewiston who prepare these meals daily—solid, dependable jobs in our local economy.

I am also proud that more than 96% of our funding comes from the federal government, with Maine contributing only 4% to support this essential program in Lewiston.

Investing in our children's educational future means more than just textbooks, buses, and computers. It includes fundamental services like toilet paper in bathrooms, fire safety in



buildings, and food for breakfast and lunch. I simply do not see why we would not continue to support something so essential and impactful.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this important bill. I urge you to support LD 577. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Alisa Roman**

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