

Ava Lerman  
Saint Agatha, ME  
LD 577

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this testimony to make you aware of the number of people in our community who rely HEAVILY on the school breakfast and lunch programs. There are many single-person households in our area, whether single mothers or fathers. These parents rely on the fact that their child/children will receive a healthy, well-balanced breakfast and lunch at school. Because we are a small community with very few resources, these meals make a huge difference in our area.

Having such a large number of single-parent families means that we have a large number of families that rely on state assistance. Some of our population or parents work shift work, so the students are left at home alone to make their meals or find something in the cupboard to eat. With this being said, it makes sense that the students' best meals would come from the school.

Once students see the benefits of nutritious and balanced eating that schools provide, they are more prone to eat for those benefits. Not only do free/reduced-price school meals for all lessen the amount of food insecurity, but they also lessen the amount of stress and anxiety that comes with worry about proper nutritional intake. Schools prioritize proper procedures to ensure each student of a certain age is getting the food that they need. Students have so many stresses that come with rising age, and stressing about food shouldn't be one. Whether their parents are facing marital issues, their pet died, they failed a midterm, they have to balance working two jobs, or all extracurricular activities, a lack of nutritional intake, especially at school, shouldn't even be a question.

For most in our area, school is a nice, refreshing break from their home life. Like everything in life, there are good and bad things to every situation. With this said, there are pros and cons to living in such a rural area. A pro is that everyone knows everyone, and with this, everyone notices behavior changes. This is good for professionals in our school system to do check-ins as soon as they see a change. However, this leads to a major con in our community. As everyone knows everyone and analyzes their normal personalities and behavior, personal and at-home life is easy to uncover. For some, they enjoy having a "school life" and an "at-home life". Mixing the two can be detrimental to the individual's health, as they may feel more comfortable being their true selves in a different setting. If school lunch had to be paid for by these students themselves, it would be very difficult.

Whether some students need to seek aid to pay for this or not, it would single out those less fortunate and those with greater fortune. Having free meals for ALL students allows everyone to be 'financially' grouped under the same roof. This belittles the stigma associated with free/reduced price meals only for those who are poverty-stricken.

School meals are something that shouldn't be taken for granted or worried about affording.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ava Lerman  
11th Grade  
Wisdom Middle/High School