

**Testimony of Emily Spindler, Camden-Rockport Elementary School, Five  
Towns/MSAD28, Camden  
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 **Emily Spindler**. I am a third grade math and science teacher at **Camden Rockport Elementary School**.

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 started my teaching career as an Ed Tech at the Beech Hill in Otis, Maine in the early 2000s, before School Meals for All. The lunchroom was always a welcoming place, where the Food Service Manager knew everyone's name and everything about their lives. I know, based on living in a town where everyone knows all the details about everything, that many families could have benefitted from having their child fed, and fed well, at school. I was the school liaison for the local food pantry. We knew students qualified for free and reduced lunch, but it was obvious that some students were falling through the cracks. Additionally, I remember having to send home notices of school lunch debt. Students with unpaid bills would be served a peanut butter sandwich. Now times have changed. Maine has led the way.*

*Two years ago I returned to Maine to accept a position at Camden-Rockport Elementary School. I was eager to return to Maine because of their education system. MSAD28's child-centered approach and the dignity in which they treat all students is one of the reasons that drew me back to teaching in Maine. My current lunchroom has an amazing menu, with everything from pasta, to build your own burritos, to special choice days where our Food Service Manager takes requests from the students. One day, an early dismissal no less, she made enough sushi for all 300 students in our building. Every student was allowed this opportunity - to either eat something they loved or try something new. Almost every student ate school lunch that day. School Meals for all reduces administrative burden on food service professionals like Ms. Sarah which allows them to create innovative menus and respond to student feedback.*

*Children need to eat. As teachers, we expect our students to have a typical amount of focus, to attend to lessons, be kind to others, to grow in knowledge. We expect them to grow to be good humans. Studies show that school meals support learning, attendance, and positive behavior in the classroom. Over 100,000 kids eat school meals every day in Maine. My students eagerly check the menu before lunch and look forward to their favorite meals. They try new things they wouldn't typically get at home, and love the privilege they have of giving Ms Sarah menu suggestions.*

*Children are already suffering from a myriad of family issues - even in a wealthy area. We see housing insecurity, substance misuse, and families with DHHS involvement. We can't guarantee students are safe and healthy at home. But we can keep them safe at school, and take care of them. That includes feeding them. We might provide the only kind words a child hears. Their breakfast and lunch might be the only meals they get.*

*Thank you for your time and commitment to our children.*

**Emily Spindler**  
**Camden-Rockport Elementary School**