

Christina Schechtman
Topsham
LD 577

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

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 sponsoring this important bill.

Since its implementation, this initiative has profoundly benefited students, families, and educational institutions.

Access to nutritious meals is fundamental to a child's ability to learn and succeed. Studies have consistently shown that when students are well-nourished, they exhibit improved concentration, higher test scores, and increased attendance. By ensuring that every child receives breakfast and lunch at no cost, we are laying the groundwork for a more effective and equitable educational environment.

Prior to this program, students eligible for free or reduced-price meals often faced stigma, deterring some from participating. Universal free meals have eradicated this issue, fostering an inclusive atmosphere where all children can dine together without fear of judgment.

The economic relief provided to families is also substantial. With the rising costs of living, removing the expense of school meals has allowed parents to allocate resources to other essential needs, thereby enhancing the overall well-being of Maine households.

Consistent access to balanced meals contributes to better physical health among children, addressing issues such as childhood obesity and related diseases.

But despite these successes, proposed federal budget cuts pose a significant threat to the sustainability of this program. Reductions in funding could undermine the progress we've made, potentially leaving many children vulnerable to food insecurity once again.

In conclusion, the Free School Meals for All program is not merely a policy but a commitment to the future of Maine's children. I urge you to advocate for the preservation of this vital initiative, ensuring that every child in our state has the nourishment they need to thrive academically and personally.

Thank you for your attention.