

Anya Davidson
Readfield
LD 577

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

My name is Anya Davidson and I am the school nurse at Maranacook Community High School of RSU38 located in Readfield. I am also a resident of Readfield and a parent of a child in the district.

I am writing in Support of LD 577 “An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine’s Universal School Meals Program”.

As a school nurse who is involved in the Maranacook Area Food Pantry (located in the Middle School) I see how many families in the community are food insecure. I help coordinate and set families up with these services and have been active in delivering food boxes to families around the district for several years. Weekly we have around 25-30 families who receive a food box.

School meals for all is a public health intervention. Maine has the highest rate of child food insecurity in New England. 1 in 5 kids in Maine experience food insecurity, and 40% are not eligible for school meals.

School meals not only reduce food insecurity but also improve health and educational outcomes for Maine kids. Studies show that school meals not only reduce childhood hunger but also decrease childhood weight issues, improve child nutrition and wellness, enhance child development and school readiness, support learning, attendance, and behavior.

Multiple studies have shown that School Meals for All increases participation in school meals and reduces the stigma associated with receiving a “free lunch”. Since the start of School Meals for All, Maine has seen a 25% increase in school meal participation, over 100,000 kids eat school meals every day. In the past school year alone over \$29M meals were served to Maine students. School Meals for All supports Maine families by helping families save an average of \$160 a month per child. It reduces stress and saves time for busy families when they know their kids will be fed two meals at school.

School Meals for All has freed up school nutrition professionals from chasing lunch money and paperwork, giving them more time to: develop creative menus and focus on what they’re serving to kids. They can engage more deeply with students and be responsive to students’ dietary needs and preferences. Staff are able to focus on providing culturally important foods that reflect the diversity of Maine’s students.

With more time they can develop their culinary skills through trainings and professional development opportunities. School Meals for All also supports local farms and our food services using less processed foods. During the 2023/2024 school year, over \$968,000 was spent on local foods by Maine schools.

I’d like to end by thanking Senator Tipping for his commitment to school meals in Maine. Thank you to the co-chairs and committee for your time and commitment to Maine’s children. Please support LD 577 “An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine’s Universal School Meals Program” to help our children learn, grow, and develop as they should during their school age years.

Anya Davidson
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