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LD 577

Support school meals

I urge the committee to support LD 577: An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program.

In so many ways, it has become clear that we cannot rely on the Federal government to do its job in supporting the lives of our nation's citizens. In the face of this, and recognizing that there will be some cost, it is important for states to step in and do what we can to take up the slack.

One of those threats is federal funding for school meals. As a parent of three children who went through the public schools in [1]Bowdoinham and then at Mt. Ararat in Topsham, where I also taught for more than 30 years, I know how important good nutrition is to learning, and to the health and welfare of all young people.

I applauded when Governor Mills signed the school meals for all legislation in 2021 and want to see it continue. Providing a benefit like that for all children, rather than requiring a means test, takes away the stigma of being in the school lunch line that I saw when I was a high school teacher. It's also democratic and fair that something like that applies equally to all. We don't pick out students whose families cannot afford to buy a laptop and make the other students buy their own. All students are given the same tools, and it has been that way since Senator King was governor. We don't provide school books and materials to kids based on a means test, and charge those whose families can pay. They all get the same materials.

And it should be that way with school nutrition.

Furthermore, providing school nutrition for everybody encourages nutrition programs to improve the quality of food, for instance, by working with local farmers to add more Maine products to what gets served at school.

Of course, we should insist that the federal government give our state the money that Congress has already appropriated for us... but in the absence of that, let's not let the ideology of the executive branch negatively impact our kids. They are the future.

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