

Testimony of Megan Nadeau, Biddeford Maine 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 Megan Nadeau. I am the parent of a student at Biddeford Primary School and public health professional.

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.

Universal school meals have meant so much to my family as my daughter started her public school journey last year. Ask any primary caregiver you know (most generally these are the moms) about the "mental load" of raising children. The unseen burden of knowing whether it is a day where a certain color shirt should be worn, or if sneakers are needed for Phys. Ed, or a school library book is due, when the next dentist appointment is takes a lot of energy. Add on top of all of those things for each child, primary caregiver, aka most moms, also generally manage their household and make sure laundry is done, sports uniforms are washed, and, yes even, managing things for a spouse asking where shoes, a phone charger, or car keys are, all add up. Having access to free school meals takes one thing off that mental load list- I know my child can go to school and have a healthy breakfast and lunch every day, and I don't have to think about making sure there's money on her account or whether we have enough bread in the house to make a sandwich (if sandwiches are even a food that's liked this week). Simply put free meals are a saving grace for me and my family.

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 reduce food insecurity and improve health and educational outcomes for Maine students!

Studies show that school meals:

- [Reduce childhood hunger](#)
- [Decrease childhood weight issues and obesity and improve child nutrition and wellness](#)
- [Enhance child development and school readiness](#)
- [Support learning, attendance, and behavior](#)
- [Are the healthiest meals for many children](#)

Multiple studies have shown that Universal school meals increases participation in the school meals program and reduces the stigma associated with receiving a "free lunch", making school meals a valued part of the school day for *all* students. Since the start of School Meals for All, Maine has seen a 25% increase in school meal participation, with over 100,000 students eat school meals every day. 100,000 students. This bill will ensure that all schools that are eligible to operate CEP are supported and able to maximize federal funding and reduce administrative burdens.

Maine students should never be a political pawn, the uncertainty of funding at the Federal level should not impact whether or not all students and families in Maine can afford to feed their children healthy meals. Thank you Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs for your time and commitment to Maine students and families.

Megan Nadeau
Biddeford, Maine