

Testimony of Martha Poliquin, Lisbon Falls 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 Martha Poliquin. I am a retired Maine School Nutrition Director.

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.

When I started working in school nutrition 30 years ago, I had the unpleasant and demoralizing task of notifying families of their unpaid school lunch account balances. I was acquainted with the families I was contacting and their situations and how embarrassing this was. And I knew that no amount of pressure from me to pay their bill was going to change their ability to pay that pay. I dreamed of a time when we wouldn't need to ask any student or family to pay for something so basic and necessary as a lunch during their school day.

I cried with joy when School Meals For All became law in Maine in 2021. It was a game changer!! It leveled the playing, or rather, eating field. No student would ever again risk denial of or shame for having lunch at school because of their financial situation. School nutritional professionals would no longer need to chase down unpaid balances.

We are now at risk of undoing the value and core tenets of this landmark legislation with proposed changes to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) qualifying percentages from the Federal government. And requiring School Nutrition Program operators to verify 100% of the eligibility applications (which under School Meals For All, families no longer have to submit) will be hugely burdensome and take away from the time staff now have to prepare nutritious, from scratch, lunches full of local Maine grown and produced food.

In Maine, we take care of our people! In 2021, the Maine Legislature showed that one way to do that was by passing School Meals For All. Now, in 2025, please lead the Maine Legislature in supporting LD 577 to reaffirm and shore up School Meals For All.

AND, a school day isn't counted as a day of school unless lunch is provided. THAT says how important school lunch is for all!

Thank you for your support,

Martha Poliquin, Lisbon Falls, Maine