



April 10, 2025

Testimony of Cultivating Community, Portland, ME 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 Silvan Shawe, and I am the Director at Cultivating Community, a non-profit with a mission to grow food justice in Greater Portland by providing education, resources, and opportunities to grow and access food.

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony on why we are in support of LD 577, and encourage you to also support this essential bill. I'd also like to thank Senator Tipping for his commitment to school meals in Maine.

For over 20 years, Cultivating Community has partnered with school districts in Greater Portland to build school gardens, provide nutrition education, increase food access, and the availability of nutritious local produce and culturally familiar foods in school meals by working directly with school nutrition directors and cafeteria staff.

Over 100,000 Maine children eat and depend on school meals every day. I am also testifying as someone who has relied on food assistance and acutely knows the feeling of going to school and knowing I wouldn't have lunch. In this moment, when the federal social safety net programs are being cut, I am asking Maine to stand strong in support of Maine's Universal School Meals Program. Maine already has the highest hunger rate in New England, and school meals are a lifeline for kids with multiplying benefits across our communities.

This bill makes sense. Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) increases efficiency and streamlines school meal administration and helps Maine maximize federal dollars for education and nutrition. CEP is important to support Maine's School Meals for All policy. 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.

Thank you for your consideration,

Silvan Shawe

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