

Testimony of Lily Chaleff, South Portland, Maine
In Support of LD 577

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 577 "An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program".

My name is Lily Chaleff. I have worked in the farm-to school sector in Maine statewide for 10+ years with districts across the state, and have seen first hand the incredibly positive impacts of School Meals For All (SM4A) across the state.

SM4A has been the most impactful policy change for students, families, and food service staff making the meals. It frees up so much time for staff to actually focus on cooking food, rather than doing paperwork and being debt collectors. It removes the burden from the local ed budget to make ends meet. It reduces stigma for *all* students, and creates a more positive school environment. It saves families money and time, while reducing shame and burden for those experiencing poverty.

I understand that federal funding cuts are hurting Maine, but this is a top priority program to invest in and maintain. *Just like Maine set the precedent for other states to pass SM4A, it can also set the negative precedent to roll back programs if we do not uphold this program today. You are leaders and your choice today impacts students and families in Maine, and also nationwide.*

As more states take on SM4A, it is clear that this ultimately needs to be adopted by the federal government. I urge you to stay steadfast to fully funding SM4A for this year and the following, even in the midst of federal setbacks to CEP, SNAP, and more. Hunger is not a partisan issue. We can all get behind creating a positive work environment for staff and an eating environment for students that takes stress off of Maine families and directly benefits our aquaculture and agriculture sectors.

In closing, **I urge all committee members to support this bill to fully fund School Meals For All. We can't go back.** Thank you to the co-chairs and committee for your time and commitment to Maine's children.

Sincerely,
Lily Chaleff