

Rebecca Carr  
Yarmouth  
LD 577

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Yarmouth, Maine  
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Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Carr and I am a resident of Yarmouth. I am writing today 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.

As a mom of two school-aged children, I know how critical it is for kids to have access to nutritious food not only for their physical development but for their ability to focus, absorb all that they are learning, and navigate their rapidly changing social environments. Studies confirm my own knowledge and show that reducing food insecurity improves health and educational outcomes for kids.

Maine has the highest rate of food insecurity in New England with 1 in 5 experiencing food insecurity and 40% not eligible for federal nutrition programs. I remember that there was a stigma around receiving free or reduced lunch when I was a kid and school meals were only available through the federal nutrition program. Dealing with the social challenges of being a kid is hard enough without also feeling the sting of being "othered" because you don't have access to consistent, healthy food. Making school meals universally available removes this stigma and simplifies the ability for schools to provide food to all kids regardless of their parent's financial status.

I was born and raised in Maine and one of the things I love about this state is that our close-knit communities care about each other. Protecting our School Meals for All program is an important part of honoring that commitment to Maine children. I want to thank the co-chairs and committee for your time and consideration.