

Testimony of Melissa Hackett
Policy Associate, Maine Children's Alliance
In support of LD 577, An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's
Universal School Meals Program
April 10, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett, and I am a policy associate at the Maine Children's Alliance, a non-profit policy and advocacy organization focused on improving the lives of Maine children, youth, and families.

MCA is proud of the support we gave several years ago to expand school meals so it could be available to every k-12 student in Maine. This was supported by research and evidence that making it universal reduces stigma for students eating school meals and ensures students have at least those healthy meals during school time. This is important to children's healthy development and it eliminates the distractions to learning that comes with being hungry.

Maine took a big and important step to support the health and learning of our students when we passed school meals for all with strong bipartisan support. Now, at a time when there are concerns about the state fiscal picture, with rising costs for everyday needs like food for families, and with possible significant cuts to food programs at the federal level, it is a critical moment for Maine to sustain its commitment to students.

Even with this support, there are an estimated 45,800 children in Maine who experience food insecurity – the highest rate of food insecurity in New England. The need remains clear and urgent. We strongly encourage the committee to support this legislation, and ensure we sustain our commitment to providing nutritious meals to support the health and learning of all Maine students.

Thank you.