



Testimony in Support of LD 776: An Act to Provide Free School Lunches to Special Purpose Private Schools That Receive Students from the Public School System

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Gay Anne McDonald and I am the Executive Director for the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the MADSEC Legislative Committee pursuant to LD 776: *An Act to Provide Free School Lunches to Special Purpose Private Schools That Receive Students from the Public School System*.

Currently, Maine provides free school meals to all public school students, a policy implemented to combat student hunger and promote better learning outcomes. However, we understand not all students receiving their education at special purpose private schools (SPPS) receive the same benefit. These schools, while serving publicly funded students, may not be eligible for, or are not receiving, the same meal reimbursement as public schools, leading to disparities for students with disabilities. SPPS are non-profit, state approved schools serving the most vulnerable public school students.

This discrepancy creates a practice where students, who would otherwise be enrolled in local public schools if not determined by the local IEP team, would receive meals at no cost to parents or the school. Such inequity undermines the foundational principle that all Maine students deserve the right to receive free, nutritious school meals to thrive educationally.

MADSEC is in no way an expert in school nutrition billing and it remains unclear whether reimbursement is already available to SPPS and hindered by procedural barriers, or whether legislative change is required to correct systemic oversight. However, whichever the case, MADSEC strongly believes that public school students who receive their education at SPPS should receive free meals - just as they would if attending their local public school.

If legislative change is required, MADSEC respectfully requests that the Committee move LD 776 forward as it aligns with Maine's commitment to ensure Maine public school students receive free meals and rectifies the current inequity. Respectfully, MADSEC would offer the recommendation to amend bill language to include public day treatment programs (regional programs).

Thank you for your time and upholding the state's responsibility to provide comprehensive support to every child under its care.

Gay Anne McDonald
Executive Director

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