

State of Maine  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Fern Desjardins, Chair of the Maine State Board of Education

Against: L.D. 1256 An Act to Support Healthy Meal Programs in Maine Schools by Allowing the School Revolving Renovation Fund to Make Loans to Repair and Renovate School Kitchens and Cafeterias

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Salisbury

Date: April 14, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Fern Desjardins, Chair of the Maine State Board of Education. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the State Board against L.D. 1256: An Act to Support Healthy Meal Programs in Maine Schools by Allowing the School Revolving Renovation Fund to Make Loans to Repair and Renovate School Kitchens and Cafeterias.

The funding currently available for School Revolving Renovation Fund (SRRF) projects is inadequate to fully fund projects under Priority One, let alone projects in Priority Two through Five. To add the renovating of school kitchens and cafeterias and replacing or adding kitchen equipment to facilitate the serving of meals to students under Priority One should be reconsidered. In some schools it could be just as beneficial, if not more, to target other areas used for instruction or support services. Roof leaks, poor air quality, hazardous materials, or areas not ADA compliant affect the health and safety of students in all areas of a school, not just kitchens and cafeterias. Priority One needs to continue addressing all areas of a school building, not making the kitchens and cafeterias take precedent over rotted window frames and doors or damaged water and septic systems.

Superintendents throughout Maine have brought up the need for more money in the SRRF to the State Board's School Construction Committee and more recently, to the Governor's Commission on School Construction. We've heard how well-managed and helpful the funds have been to school systems. The majority of comments made about Rule Chapter 64 are about inadequate funding to meet renovation needs. That is where the focus should be, not on adding a specific room(s) for funding or equipment.

Lastly, it may be helpful to wait for the final report from the Governor's Commission on School Construction before making any changes to Rule Chapter 64 or taking action on bills impacting school construction and renovations.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.