

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 2017

AN ACT TO UPDATE CERTAIN STATUTES GOVERNING SCHOOL NUTRITION

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Robbie Feinberg, Director of Communications and Government Relations for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 2017.

School leaders across Maine have seen the immense impact that Maine's universal school meals program has had on student behavior, learning and well-being, and we are thankful for the legislature and your committee for continuing to support this effort.

One consequence of that legislation has been ensuring an accurate count of students in each district who are economically disadvantaged. This number directly impacts the amount of funding that our state receives from the federal government for meal reimbursement, and also has an impact on the amount of state and federal funding that each school district ultimately receives.

Districts had previously used free-and-reduced-price lunch counts to determine these student numbers. But the change to universal school meals has made it more difficult to get an accurate FRPL count. We have supported the state's recent efforts to utilize direct certification, instead of relying on parents to fill out forms from their school, and we believe L.D. 2017 could improve that process even further.

From our conversations with the department, L.D. 2017 will help to facilitate the development of an online portal that will allow Maine families to complete applications for free and reduced-price meal forms while they complete other benefit forms, such as when applying for MaineCare or SNAP benefits.

We believe this is a common sense approach – allowing state agencies to assist our local districts in accounting for these families, streamlining the meal application process, and ensuring Maine and local districts receive federal and state dollars they need to best educate their students.

School meals are crucial to the health and well-being of Maine children. L.D. 2017 will further streamline the meal application process and reduce administrative burdens, and we urge your committee to support it.

Thank you for your consideration.