

Testimony of Anna Korsen, Full Plates Full Potential

Neither for nor against LD 2212 An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, esteemed members of the joint standing committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs, I'm Anna Korsen, Deputy Director with [Full Plates Full Potential](#), a statewide non-profit working to address childhood food insecurity in Maine by maximizing access to federally funded USDA nutrition programs like SNAP and school meals. We are a founding member of the [Hunger Free Maine Coalition](#), advocating to advance policies in Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger. I also serve as the co-chair of the Ending Hunger in Maine Advisory Committee.

We applaud the continued investment in Maine's Healthy School Meals for All policy to address **Maine's high rate of childhood food insecurity, particularly in rural communities**. Everyday, Maine schools feed record numbers of students but many struggle to meet the growing demand for school breakfast and lunch because of outdated or inadequate kitchens.¹ Not only is this an issue related to the underfunding of federal nutrition programs like school meals, this is also a symptom of a larger issue caused by insufficient funding to maintain or replace aging school buildings. We urge these committees to include a mechanism to fund school renovation and construction, with a specific focus on school kitchen needs, in this proposed budget.

Earlier this session, we testified in support of [LD 2064](#), The Apple Act, which proposes a solution to an unintended challenge created by the innovation and flexibility in our public pre-K program. LD 2064 aims to ensure our youngest learners receive fair access to the benefits of our Healthy School Meals for All policy by establishing the Early Childhood Nutrition Grant Program to fund the pre-K meals that are falling between the federal nutrition bureaucratic cracks. We recommend that the language, proposed state grant funding, and Department of Education staff position to oversee and administer the grant program included in LD 2064 all be included in this supplemental budget proposal.

- Early Childhood Nutrition Grant Program = \$1,000,000
- One ongoing staff position to administer the Grant Program = \$120,00

Because Maine's early education programs are run through a variety of providers - schools, community organizations, child care, and Head Starts, the National School Lunch Program doesn't reimburse school districts for meals prepared and delivered in all of these cases. Federal funding available for child care

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/nutrition>

providers has other restrictions and barriers for some of the small facilities here. The end result is a small, but growing number of schools with meal debt and child care providers struggling to meet the costs of providing public pre-k programs. Maine's children and families do not need any more barriers or added costs in the child care sector and Maine's schools do not want to pass on meal costs (again) to families or their local budgets.

Financial pressures are intensifying for school meal programs due to high costs of food, labor, equipment and insufficient funds, according to the [School Nutrition Association](#), and when school meals aren't free, 92% of districts report having unpaid meal debt. The situation for childcare providers in Maine is not easier.² Families are also facing higher food and care costs and free **school meals can save families \$160/month per child.**³

The benefits of high-quality education for our youngest children are universally accepted and why the legislature and administration is committed to a public pre-K program for all children. The benefits of expanded access to healthy school meals for these same students are similar - higher academic achievement, better health outcomes by improving children's diets and combatting hunger⁴. These meals, because of federal standards which will be required for those accessing the grant program, limit calories, sodium, and added sugar, and are proven to be the healthiest meals American children eat.⁵

Hunger is a policy choice. Maine kids need us, and lawmakers to continue to invest in their health and education, by adapting these federal funds to Maine solutions, and making them work for all children, no matter their address. Please include funding for school infrastructure, like school kitchens, as well as the critical investments spelled out in LD 2064, The Apple Act, in this proposed supplemental budget, and continue our leadership in feeding children at school.

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² <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Printable-2026-Position-Paper.pdf>

³ <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/overall/maine>

⁴ <https://frac.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program/benefits-school-lunch>

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https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2778453?utm_source=For_The_Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_term=040921