



Mike Tipping
Senator, District 8

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Mike Tipping and I represent Senate District 8 in Penobscot County.

I'm proud to present LD 1128. This bill requires public schools participating in the school lunch program to provide the option of free milk for all students, regardless of whether they receive a lunch through the program or bring their own lunch. It also makes a small appropriation to cover the cost to schools.

This legislation is a result of what I believe was an unintended consequence of Maine's universal free school lunch program, which began last year.

In December of 2022, I heard from a parent in Veazie whose child had some specific dietary requirements. Some days they would get the sunbutter and jelly sandwich that was offered as an option at their school, but that got a bit boring and so they began packing their own lunch. However, they continued to get the same milk from the school they always had.

At the end of the semester, they were surprised to learn that despite school lunches being free, they had racked up a significant bill because they had been charged 50 cents a day for milk.

This is due to a quirk in the way the state and federal governments reimburse for school lunches. If you get milk with a lunch, it's reimbursed. If you get it on its own, it's not.

School districts across the state have experienced this issue and dealt with it in different ways. Some charge a fee to students or their parents. Some have simply paid for the milk out of their general budget and made sure it is available for free. I've included an article on the decision that RSU 29 in Houlton made to that effect. I've also heard of incidents at some schools where students have been encouraged to get the entire free lunch and throw the food away in order to keep the milk.

The Department of Education estimates that the cost of extending the school lunch program in this way would be \$250,000 a year, across Maine's 378 School Administrative Units and 170,000 students

I believe closing this loophole and making sure all students receive healthy food and beverages at lunch is a common-sense policy that we can all agree on.

I appreciate your consideration and I'm happy to answer any questions.

RSU 29 board OKs free milk plan for students

 thecounty.me/2022/09/15/news/rsu-29-board-oks-free-milk-plan-for-students/

Joseph Cyr • September 15, 2022

HOULTON, Maine — Free milk will be available for all students in RSU 29, thanks to the efforts of the district's school board.

Faced with a proposal to raise the cost of milk from 30 to 35 cents for students, the RSU 29 board instead pivoted to a proposal that will allow all students to have their choice of milk, even if they bring their own bag lunch.

All meals for students in RSU 29 have been free, regardless of the student's family income level, for a number of years. The district made the decision several years ago to cover the cost of meals so that all students would have free hot lunch to eliminate any feelings of insecurity a students might have.

Milk is included with all hot lunch meals, but any students that bring their own bag lunches were required to purchase white or chocolate milk. The school district receives its milk from Houlton Farms Dairy, a locally owned dairy plant in Houlton, at a discounted price.

"Milk prices have been touched by inflation and the economy," said RSU 29 vice chairman Erica Peabody. "As such, Houlton Farms Dairy has increased the price to the school."

Food services director Karen Carmichael estimated that the district spends about \$200 on milk annually for students who bring bag lunches. That translates to about 667 half-pint cartons of milk per year.

RSU 29 Superintendent Richard Lyons proposed to the board that the district simply absorb that cost, thereby allowing all students to have free milk with their lunches. The board unanimously approved the superintendent's recommendation.