



**Testimony of Anna Korsen, Full Plates Full Potential
In support of LD 1584**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Anna Korsen, Policy and Program Director with Full Plates Full Potential, a statewide non-profit working to address childhood food insecurity by providing technical and financial assistance to schools and communities to help feed kids now, while advocating for the systemic changes necessary to ensure that all Maine children have consistent access to nutritious meals. Our strategy is to maximize access to USDA Child Nutrition Programs - commonly known as school breakfast, school lunch, afterschool meals, and summer meals.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 1584, "An Act to Provide Funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to Temporarily Restore Benefits Being Reduced by the Federal Government." I would like to thank Representative Stover for bringing this bill forward to address the hunger cliff experienced by households across Maine. School meals are critical tools in addressing childhood food insecurity, but providing food insecure households with adequate SNAP dollars is the best way to ensure children have access to three meals a day, 365 days a year. To truly address rising food insecurity in Maine, we must ensure that low-income households with children have access to both adequate SNAP and school meals.

Maine has the highest rate of childhood food insecurity in New England, with 1 in 6 kids¹ lacking consistent access to nutrition. Food insecurity during critical developing years too often leads to poor health and overall negative lifetime outcomes for children,² resulting in high costs to society.³ For many students, school meals are the only reliable source of food and the most nutritious meals they receive⁴, and Maine's historic law to feed every child at school at no cost has helped to increase access to food during the school day. However, when school is out in the evenings, on weekends, during vacations, on snowdays, and over the summer, children living in food insecure households lose access to those reliable meals. Many schools and communities

¹ <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/child/maine>

² <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/144/4/e20190397/38475/Food-Insecurity-and-Child-Health?autologincheck=redirected>

³ <https://www.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/child-economy-study.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/13/health/healthy-school-food-nutrition-wellness/index.html>



operate summer meal programs that are meant to supplement school meals and address summer hunger, but those programs only reach about 27% of the kids that need them.⁵

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the federal government put into place temporary programs to address poverty, including increased monthly SNAP benefits through Emergency Allotments. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, those extra SNAP dollars resulted in a 14% decrease in child poverty.⁶ Even though food insecurity hasn't gone away, the Emergency Allotments ended in March, resulting in drastic cuts to households' grocery budgets. Tied with rising costs of food and other basic needs, the loss of those SNAP dollars means that food insecurity is once again on the rise in Maine. For the nearly 38,000 Maine students living in households that rely on SNAP⁷, the recent cuts to this critical resource are catastrophic. To make matters worse, since the end of the SNAP Emergency Allotments, food pantries are seeing an increase in demand and are struggling to meet the growing need. Many are reporting empty shelves. With summer vacation looming, food insecure students are about to lose access to the school meals they rely on for basic nutrition. Summer is often the hungriest time for those students, and lack of access to food results in significant set-back in school readiness for those kids.

When the federal government ended the temporary program to provide school meals at no cost to all students, Maine stepped in to make sure no child would go hungry at school. We are again faced with the opportunity to make sure Maine children and their families have access to the critical nutrition they need to thrive. I urge you to support LD 1584 to fill the gap left behind by the end of the SNAP Emergency Allotments. Maine kids can't wait.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. I would be happy to answer any questions you have, and can provide more information and be available for the work session.

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⁵ <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/hunger-doesnt-take-a-vacation-summer-nutrition-status-report-2022>

⁶ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/temporary-pandemic-snap-benefits-will-end-in-remaining-35-states-in-march>

⁷ <https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/nutrition/programs/nsfp/cep>