



**Testimony of Justin Strasburger, Full Plates Full Potential  
In support of LD 1544**

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation. My name is Justin Strasburger, Executive 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 1544, "An Act to Improve Economic Security for Maine Children by Establishing the Maine Dependent Tax Credit." I would like to thank Representative Terry for bringing this important bill forward.

Maine has the highest rate of childhood food insecurity in New England, with at least 1 in 6 kids<sup>1</sup> lacking consistent access to nutrition. Food insecurity during critical developing years too often leads to poor health and overall negative lifetime outcomes for children,<sup>2</sup> resulting in high costs to society.<sup>3</sup> For many students, school meals are the only reliable source of food and the most nutritious meals they receive<sup>4</sup>, 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 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.<sup>5</sup> Long story short, when children from food insecure households are out of school, families face additional hardship in accessing basic needs like food.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the federal government put into place temporary programs to address poverty, including expanding the federal child tax credit. Nearly 125,000

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

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

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

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

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



Maine families with low income used their Child Tax Credit for basic needs like food.<sup>6</sup> Even though poverty and food insecurity have not gone away, the expanded Child Tax Credit was rolled back, resulting in drastic cuts to households' budgets. As a result, six times more families reported food insecurity.<sup>7</sup>

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 basic needs like food, clothing, shelter and utilities. Furthermore, investing in basic needs for children and their families has a significant return on investment, with societal gains and savings resulting from improved educational and health outcomes. Economists estimate that the expanded Child Tax credit resulted in a **1000% return on investment**, about \$10 for every \$1 spent.<sup>8</sup> According to the Center on Poverty and Social Policy, the proposed expansion of Maine's existing child tax credit in LD 1544 would lift 3,500 Maine children out of poverty.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. I urge you to support LD 1544. Maine kids can't wait. 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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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mecep.org/taxes-and-budget/report-how-the-child-tax-credit-was-spent-in-maine/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/2024/2023\\_kidscount\\_databook\\_interactive.pdf](https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/2024/2023_kidscount_databook_interactive.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/2021/child-allowance/cost-benefit-analysis>