

**Testimony of Chris Piercey (Auburn Public Schools Nutrition Director, Poland,
ME Resident)
In Support of LD 577**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Chris Piercey. I am the School Nutrition Director at Auburn Public Schools.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 577 "An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program". I'd like to thank Senator Tipping for his commitment to school meals in Maine.

I've been fortunate to have been a school nutrition director for over 10^{years} and have seen all sorts of examples of the real stigma that persisted around meals served in schools. Persisted, until the historic passing of School Meals for All which has made the cafeteria a level playing field where ALL students can receive a healthy, complete meal regardless of their family's financial status without any fear of shame or recognition simply because they were hungry and wanted to fill their belly. This now universal understanding that the meals which are provided at no cost in school cafeterias in the state of Maine helps embolden a welcome environment for ALL. This is a shining example of the current generation of Mainers providing the necessary resources to improve the quality of life for our youngest and most vulnerable population.

Schools, through the preservation of School Meals for ALL, have the ability to return to being the most important, impactful and vital resource in the every community. With the increase in participation we've seen in Auburn we've grown our farm to school program to include integrating 26 local farms and business into our school meal program. Over the past 2 years through our local purchases we've reinvested over \$90,000 back into the Maine economy....and we are just getting started.

Within the State of Maine there exist a robust food system working at a fever pitch leaving no stone unturned doing everything in its power to keep Maine food in Maine. Food processors, food hubs, distributors, slaughterhouses, farms, granaries and fisheries are all focused on schools and their collective buying power as a key cog in meeting Maine's ambitious goal of keeping 30% of all food consumed in the state coming from State producers by 2030. Schools with their passionate, creative, (and



just like we showed during the pandemic) resourceful Child Nutrition Staff are the solution to ensuring Maine meets this 30% threshold. School Meals for All is a linchpin in the plan that makes this possibility a reality.

LD 577 "An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meal's Program" is a continuation and a definitive stamp of approval that Maine continues to break the mold if necessary to do what's best for the future generations of Mainers and I profoundly support it.

Thank you Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs for your commitment to all children in Maine and if there are any questions I will do my best to answer them.

Chris Piercey
Auburn Public Schools