



Mike Tipping
Senator, District 8

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I'm Mike Tipping, I represent District 8 in Penobscot County and I'm pleased to introduce LD 577 and a proposed amendment, which would retitle the bill to: "An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program." I appreciate your help and flexibility in amending this bill in light of the rapid and devastating changes in policy at the federal level.

In the three years since School Meals for All was implemented, Maine has seen a 25% increase in school meal participation and now more than 100,000 kids eat meals prepared at school every day across our state. My own two kids are among them.

This program has sparked a revolution in how kids are fed during the school day. We've made rapid progress in serving more local food in schools, seen more student engagement in menu choices, and more schools are taking on scratch cooking as opposed to pre-packaged meals. At the same time as it has fed kids, this program has lowered costs for working families. It's estimated that free school meals save families \$160 a month for each child that gets breakfast and lunch at school.

I've introduced this bill now as a chance to solidify our commitment to feeding all of Maine's children, in light of draconian budget proposals making their way through D.C. that would make it harder for schools to feed students and for their families to access federal nutrition programs – cuts that are being proposed in order to fund massive new tax cuts for the wealthy.

With the proposed federal rollback of the Community Eligibility Provision, or, CEP, and proposed 100% household income verification requirement for free and reduced price school meal eligibility, along with proposed cuts to SNAP and Medicaid, we may need to prepare for reduced federal funding for school meals and increased administrative burden for schools and families. This bill is an attempt to get ahead of those cuts, and to ensure that Maine is prepared to support schools through these changes and can continue our successful efforts to feed all kids at school at no cost.

The first part of the amendment would require that eligible schools participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) in order to maximize federal funding. Other states with universal school meal policies, including Colorado, California, and Massachusetts, have this in statute and have seen success.

At this time, any school is eligible to participate in CEP if they have an identified student percentage, or, ISP, of 25% or more students that are automatically enrolled in free school meals through SNAP, MaineCare, TANF, and participation in other programs. The federal proposal would roll eligibility for CEP back to 60% ISP, meaning fewer schools would be eligible to draw from federal funding and would have to rely on state funding to help administer free school meals. However, the details and timing of this proposed rollback remain unclear.

Having this law on the books will help Maine to maximize federal funding for school meals regardless of federal changes, even if the federal funding available for Maine is significantly reduced.

The other parts of the bill include an additional \$6M for Maine's contribution to School Meals for All, which was included in the Governor's biennial budget proposal. This is needed to continue School Meals for All over the next two years, based on the current projections of federal funding coming into the state. As the Appropriations Committee continues to work on Part Two of the biennial budget, it is my hope that including the funding provisions in this bill will communicate that funding school meals remains a priority.

The final piece of the bill is language to ensure schools and the DOE have the administrative and financial support they need to weather the proposed federal changes and potential decrease in federal funding. This is likely to require an additional cost.

For schools in my district, the impact of proposed federal cuts would be significant. It is estimated by Full Plates Full Potential that over \$580,000 in federal funding would be lost next school year and not a single school in my district would be eligible to participate in CEP, despite significant poverty and hunger.

Together, Mainers have made incredible progress in making sure kids don't have to go through their school days on an empty stomach and that no kid ever has to feel ashamed or singled out because they get a subsidized lunch. We've done so because we know it increases educational outcomes, lowers costs for families and is simply the right thing to do for our kids.

Today you will hear from school nutrition professionals, students, educators, parents, farmers, small business owners and other advocates who will share the important and far-reaching impacts of Maine's School Meals for All policy.

We must work together to keep our kids fed.