



**Testimony of Renee Page, Healthy Communities of the Capital Area, Hallowell
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 Renee Page. I am Executive Director at Healthy Communities of the Capital Area (HCCA), a Maine Prevention Network lead organization and home to Maine Farm & Sea to School and Maine Farm & Sea to Institution.

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.

HCCA supports school meals for all as a public health intervention. Given Maine's high rates of food insecurity and diet-related chronic disease and addiction, school meals for all is a powerful strategy to address these issues through increased access to healthier foods. We know that diets rich in fresh, local food impact long-term health outcomes thereby decreasing the costly burden of chronic disease and addiction, and improving overall quality of life. With abrupt federal funding cuts to the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program, the Local Foods for Schools program, and the Local Food Purchase Assistance program, and potential cuts to Community Eligibility, it is imperative that we sustain state programs like school meals for all to minimize the disruption to school meals as much as possible.

Additionally, school meals for all increases participation in local food procurement resulting in new markets for Maine's food producers, who are already feeling the impacts of the aforementioned federal cuts and others. As we often say, farm to school is a triple win. A win for kids, a win for farmers, and a win for communities. Sustaining school meals for all will help continue the farm to school momentum that has been built over the past several years.

Thank you Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and committee members for your time and commitment to Maine's children and schools. I am happy to answer any questions you may have and can make myself available for upcoming work sessions.

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