

Today, I want to speak to you from the heart—not just as someone who works in our schools every day, but as someone who believes deeply in the power of a shared meal to change lives.

Maine has made national headlines for what we're doing with school meals—and not by accident. We've become leaders in serving innovative, delicious, and locally sourced school food that's setting the bar for the rest of the country. But behind those headlines are thousands of people—farmers, food service workers, educators, advocates—who have worked tirelessly to eliminate the stigma around school meals and ensure that every student has access to breakfast and lunch, no matter their family's income.

If you stepped into our cafeterias today, you wouldn't see long lines of kids avoiding the lunch line. You'd see packed lunchrooms full of students enjoying real food—Maine-raised beef, local chicken and pork, fresh vegetables, hand-picked apples, and creamy Maine-made yogurt. This is not your standard image of “school lunch,” and it's time people knew that.

We're feeding students with dignity, creativity, and care. And we're supporting Maine farmers and Maine businesses in the process. But if we lose funding, if we start charging again, participation drops. When that happens, schools are forced to fall back on cheaper, more processed food. And that is a cycle we cannot go back to.

Let's be clear: hungry kids can't learn. When a child walks into school hungry, no amount of books, laptops, or even the most dedicated teacher can help them focus the way a full stomach can. Food is not an extra. It's not a privilege. It's a basic need—just like toilet paper in the bathroom or electricity in the classroom.

And the ripple effects of feeding kids are real. Though I don't have the exact numbers in front of me, we've seen it—fewer visits to the nurse's office, fewer hallway fights, more engagement in the classroom. Because when a child is nourished, they can thrive.

This is about more than food. It's about setting our kids up for success, no matter their zip code or background. It's about continuing the momentum we've already built here in Maine. We are a model for the nation—let's not step backward.

So I urge you—as parents, educators, lawmakers, community members—let’s support the National School Lunch Program. Let’s support Meals for All. Let’s keep meals free for every student in the State of Maine. Because our children deserve it. Because our farmers deserve it. And because a better future starts with a good meal.