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Testimony of Representative Suzanne Salisbury presenting
**LD 1256, An Act to Support Healthy Meal Programs in Maine
Schools by Allowing the School Revolving Renovation Fund to
Make Loans to Repair and Renovate School Kitchens and
Cafeterias**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Sue Salisbury and I represent House District 128, which includes part of Westbrook. I am here to present **LD 1256, An Act to Support Healthy Meal Programs in Maine Schools by Allowing the School Revolving Renovation Fund to Make Loans to Repair and Renovate School Kitchens and Cafeterias.**

School nutrition programs across our state are tasked with the important job of feeding Maine's students and often lack the proper equipment to do so. Many Maine schools are ill-equipped to prepare and serve nutritious meals as they are challenged with outdated, broken and missing equipment like ovens, stovetops, refrigerators, freezers and more. Maine schools are feeding more students than ever before, with over 100,000 students eating school lunch every day. School kitchens are making great strides in sourcing and serving healthy, local foods, but they can only do so if they have the kitchen infrastructure to support it.

In the 131st Legislature, we worked together to establish the School Meal Equipment and Program Improvement Fund because it was clear that schools needed a flexible pot of funding that could support kitchen equipment, cafeteria equipment and specialized products that are needed for all meal programs. And boy, were we right. Once available to schools, the \$385,000 in funding for kitchen equipment was depleted in 10 days and the DOE could not fulfill all the requests they received. Furthermore, the USDA recently froze the funding that included federal school kitchen equipment grants. Normally, this federal funding is available to Maine schools every year. Without access to those funds, Maine schools will need our help

even more.

LD 1256 would provide an additional \$500,000 to the School Meal Equipment and Program Improvement Fund to ensure the state can meet the ongoing needs in school kitchens. In addition, it would also amend the School Revolving Renovation Fund statute to include specific language about school kitchen and cafeteria upgrades and renovations, making it clear that these projects are priorities for the Fund. This amendment is timely, as the Governor's Commission on School Construction Funding is wrapping up their work to review school construction needs throughout the state and will be issuing a report with recommendations this month.

Maine has the highest rate of childhood food insecurity in New England, with 1 in 5 Maine kids unsure of where their next meal will come from. School meals are the most reliable and nutritious meals for food insecure children, and Maine schools are feeding students at record numbers every day. We must ensure that school kitchens are well equipped to meet the nutritional needs of their students.

I hope you will join me in supporting LD 1256.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.