



Testimony of Colleen Frawley, Full Plates Full Potential In Support of LD 2064, The Apple Act

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Colleen Frawley and I am the Advocacy Manager with Full Plates Full Potential, a statewide non-profit working to address childhood food insecurity in Maine by maximizing access to USDA nutrition programs like school breakfast, lunch, SNAP, and summer meals. I am also a mother of two children and a former middle school and university teacher.

As champions for School Meals for All, you already know the importance of our universal school meals policy and investment to address **Maine's high rate of childhood food insecurity, particularly in rural communities**. You are also familiar with the challenges in ensuring one-size fits all federal programs, like the National School Lunch Program, work for the local solutions and programs which Maine's communities creatively provide to fit the needs of their residents every day - not just on paper. This bill is a welcome solution to a challenge created by the innovation and flexibility in our public pre-K program. LD 2064 aims to ensure our youngest learners receive fair access to the benefits of our Healthy School Meals for All policy by creating a grant program to fund the pre-K meals that are falling between the federal nutrition bureaucratic cracks.

Because Maine's early education programs are run through a variety of providers - schools, community organizations, child care, and Head Starts, the National School Lunch Program doesn't reimburse school districts for meals prepared and delivered in all these cases. Federal funding available for child care providers has other restrictions and barriers for some of the small facilities here. The end result is a small, but growing number of schools with meal debt and child care providers struggling to meet the costs of providing public pre-k programs. Maine's children and families do not need any more barriers or added costs in the child



care sector and Maine's schools do not want to pass on meal costs (again) to families or their local budgets.

Financial pressures are intensifying for school meal programs due to high costs of food, labor, equipment and insufficient funds, according to the School Nutrition Association, and when school meals aren't free, 92% of districts report having unpaid meal debt. The situation for childcare providers in Maine is not easier.¹ Families are also facing higher food and care costs and free **school meals can save families \$160/month per child.**²

The benefits of high-quality education for our youngest children are universally accepted and why the legislature and administration is committed to a public pre-K program for all children. The benefits of expanded access to healthy school meals for these same students are similar - higher academic achievement, better health outcomes by improving children's diets and combatting hunger³. These meals, because of federal standards which will be required for those accessing the grant program, limit calories, sodium, and added sugar, and are proven to be the healthiest meals American children eat.

Hunger is a policy choice. Maine kids need us, and lawmakers to continue to invest in their health and education, by adapting these federal funds to Maine solutions, and making them work for all children, no matter their address. We ask you to support LD 2064, The Apple Act, and continue our leadership in feeding children at school.

Colleen Frawley
cfrawley@fullplates.org
207/331-6399

¹ <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Printable-2026-Position-Paper.pdf>

² <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/overall/maine>

³ <https://frac.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program/benefits-school-lunch>