



**Testimony of Kirsten Tenney, Full Plates Full Potential
In Support of LD 1682**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Kirsten Tenney, and I am the Community Engagement Manager for Full Plates Full Potential. I am writing to support passage of LD 1682 “An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program”. I would like to thank Representative Shaw for introducing this legislation.

Full Plates Full Potential works to end childhood food insecurity by maximizing and expanding access to Federal Child Nutrition Programs. Maine has the highest rate of childhood food insecurity in New England and school meals ensure that students in Maine are fed and ready to learn!

Prior to joining the team at Full Plates Full Potential I spent time providing Nutrition Education for students Pre-K through highschool. In that role, I was able to see students try new food items, learn how to nourish their bodies, and make choices that will help them to thrive as they grow. Students in that time would love to see the “snack lady” coming, excited to see what new thing was there to try as well as tell me all about the healthier choices they made between visits.

Nutrition Education gives students the confidence to try new things. We hear from our School Nutrition partners that students are often weary of new items, especially fruits and vegetables, being served in the cafeteria but when they have the opportunity to learn about those foods and try them they are more comfortable eating them. Working in classrooms, I have witnessed that students are far more likely to try new things and make healthier choices if they are engaged in the process of growing and cooking prior to eating. Connecting Nutrition Education to meals provided by School Nutrition encourages students to participate in school breakfast and school lunch. When Nutrition Education is provided in the classroom students are able to connect that learning to what is served on their lunch tray making them more likely to try new things and participate in School Meals.

Given the tools, students begin to think not only about the food they are eating but also learning where that food comes from. There is something truly magical about planting a seed, tending it as it grows, harvesting and then enjoying the end product. There is much to be learned from this process: science, social-emotional learning, life skills and possibly a passion for agriculture.

Educating students on the importance of nutrition and agriculture in Maine will benefit not only the students but future generations of growers, makers, and farmers who learn best by doing. School gardens provide a safe, welcoming space for students to connect with each other as well as nature. Embedding this education into the school day engages the whole school community and provides opportunities for connection. Teachers, School Nutrition, families, students, farmers and growers are able to share space and spark conversations that strengthen not only the school food system but the broader food system in Maine.

I hope you will vote ought to pass on LD 1682. I am happy to answer any questions you may have, and I will



do my best to provide any additional information you may require. I am happy to be of service when you discuss this bill in the work session.

Thank you,
Kirsten Tenney
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