

TESTIMONY

In Support Of

LD 362: Resolve, To Require the Department of Education To Form a Family Income Data Collection Working Group

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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

March 8th, 2021

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is John Kosinski and I am here on behalf of the Maine Education Association (MEA) to testify in support of LD 362, Resolve, To Require the Department of Education To Form a Family Income Data Collection Working Group. The MEA represents 24,000 educators in the state of Maine, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state.

The intent of LD 362 is simple. Let us feed more children -- especially children who live in families that are at or near poverty. The proposal convenes a Working Group to bring together the organizations best prepared to help further the goal of making sure public schools are doing everything they can to meet the nutritional needs of students.

In the recent past, this Committee has prioritized nutrition for students because it recognized that hungry children cannot focus on academics. Just last session, this Committee and the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed a bill to end "food shaming." The Legislature passed and the Governor signed a bill to streamline the free/reduced lunch application and expand breakfast programs in school.

These bills represented improvements but there is still work to be done.

According to experts at the School of Public Health at Harvard University, the COVID pandemic has only worsened food insecurity among children. Four esteemed professors wrote: "[T]he percent of U.S. households with children who are food insecure has doubled, from 14% to 28%, with communities of color most affected. An

additional 2.5 million children have fallen below the poverty line since May. Every day, 14 million children are going hungry ...”¹

I fully understand some may be weary of yet another Work Group. But with a part-time, citizens’ legislature, Work Groups are an ideal way to continue to make progress – especially on such an important issue as making sure hungry children are fed.

We believe the individuals selected for this Work Group as called for in the legislation have the expertise and can bring forward ideas and concepts to help more students in poor families access the nutrition programs in our public schools. We look forward to this group’s work and we will support it in any way we can.

Thank you for your time and attention and thank you for your dedication to Maine’s students.

¹ Please see: [Children’s food insecurity increasing during COVID-19 pandemic | News | Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#)