

## **Testimony of Kenneth Kunin, Superintendent, South Portland Schools In Support of LD 362**

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Ken Kunin. I am a resident of Portland and the Superintendent of Schools in South Portland.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 362. I want to thank the bill sponsors for your commitment to addressing childhood hunger in Maine.

Over the past four decades I have seen the impact of federal policy around access to nutrition for children and how it has helped or hindered our efforts to provide equity of access to opportunity for all children. As Superintendent in a district where about 15% of our 3000 students come from around the world, having a primary home language other than English, 35 languages in all, we have frankly struggled to ensure that all who qualify for free or reduced-price meals can manage the required forms. As a high school principal, I have had to work to convince students from around the corner, that it was ok to fill out the forms to get access to free meals, which they needed, but also because it would give them access to scholarships and opportunities desperately needed in order to pursue their dreams.

How we gather this information matters. By relying on our current methodology we are missing children and families in need and as a result denying them food resources that will make a difference in educational outcomes while limiting our ability to get all of the federal funding we are due to support our students.

This bill won't change things tomorrow, but a careful study will allow Maine to be a leader in providing equity of access to needed nutrition and other resources to children free from the barriers in the current system.

I urge support of this bill on behalf of Maine's children. I thank the committee for their time and their commitment to Maine's children, Maine's future. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Ken Kunin  
Superintendent, South Portland School Department