



LEWISTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Testimony of Alisa Roman, Maine School Nutrition Association President and Director of Nutrition and Transportation Lewiston Public 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 Alisa Roman I am a resident of Winthrop and the President of the Maine School Nutrition Association serving members of the State of Maine, and the Director of Nutrition and Transportation for Lewiston Public Schools.

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.

In 2016 Lewiston Public Schools started utilizing the Community Eligibility Provision. This provision developed and utilized by the USDA allowed my school district to offer free food to all students who attended Lewiston Public Schools. This effort was not an easy task. Before I could wholeheartedly agree to this major change in operations I had to personal vet out all the other programs and grants in the district that relied on the data provided by the nutrition program to make sure that we would not loose funding in other departments because of our decision to utilize the Community Eligibility Provision.

Lewiston Public schools is able to claim 99.15% of all meals as free due to the USDA provision. It has saved the district verifying family's income, collecting 2500 plus free and reduce applications, and allowed all students regardless of income to receive nutritious meals at no cost to the family. The savings for a family with two kids is around 2,275 dollars a school year. In a district such as mine with a high percentage of identified families at or below the poverty line this money directly back in their pockets is much appreciated.

The problem with the current State funding formula is that regardless of the USDA's rules on collecting data for CEP provisions such as I just outlined is that the State still requires me to collect individual student data. In a district such as Lewiston we overcome this need by asking for families to fill out an alternative eligibility form. While not a Free and Reduced lunch form it is often considered this by staff and families who do not understand why they have to fill this form out if their students already get free meals.

I receive approximate 2,000 of these forms a year. While the district pays the fee for collecting and processing these forms I find my department still spends around 160 hours a year processing data to directly support the funding formula. I have always considered this task a small concession to offering free food for all.

Other programs directly impacted by the change in CEP have been title 1 allocation in the school district and the electronic funding formula. Currently our Title 1 funding is determined by census in Lewiston but we still need a direct eligibility for the state funding formula.

In 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic in full swing Nutrition Programs all across the state stepped up to feed the children of the state of Maine at no cost with no questions. We found that many families in turn did not fill out the Free and Reduced Forms or Eligibility Forms in their districts as many did not see the need with free food.

What we saw was a direct impact to the state funding formula. With no incentive for parents to fill out this information we ended up with a bad data set to base future funding on. We are currently in this situation. Districts that saw a big drop in identified families will see this directly hit their districts funding.

With legislation in both the State and Federal Government being considered for Universal Free Meals for all now is the time to be pro-active and retune our state funding formula to make sure it is as balanced and fair as it can be for all Maine communities. Without this much needed work we are sure to hear of school districts directly impacted by the lack of funding and departments underfunded due to a lack of solid data.

LD 362 is a great start to finding a better way that works for all. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Alisa Roman

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President Maine School Nutrition Association
Director of Nutrition and Transportation Lewiston Public Schools