



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
23 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0023

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

A. PENDER MAKIN
COMMISSIONER

March 24, 2021

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Co-chair
Representative Michael Brennan, Co-chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Committee,

LD 636, An Act To Encourage the Purchase of Local Foods for Public Schools is an amendment to 20-A §6602, subsection 7 that proposes to expand product types and delivery methods to encourage public schools to purchase local foods. It also proposes to increase the maximum cap for participants by \$1,500, bringing it to \$7,500 per year, per school administrative unit (SAU). Currently, there are 31 districts submitting reimbursement requests for the produce fund with two reaching the annual cap.

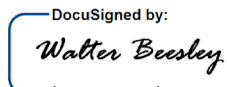
The Department of Education's Child Nutrition team has contracted with CNP-Web for new claiming software that will include the "Produce Fund" into the monthly claiming process. All claims will be submitted using a separate form, which will streamline the monthly claim reimbursement process and remind the SAUs that this is available to them. The software will be launched by July 1, 2021. The Department also has a staff member devoted to Farm and Sea to School. DOE's recent work with Maine fishermen was recently publicized by local news outlets.

Raising the funding cap will cause the available funds for the purchase of local foods to dissipate more quickly. Amending the existing statute will impact local farmers who are not working with major distributors but depend on local co-op or farm stand sales. Food grown, purchased, and picked up locally is ideal for schools and local communities.

The produce fund is great for students and local farmers alike. Teaching moments are provided for students when the product is recognizable due to minimum processing. This affords students the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the origin of each produce item, what it looks like, and how it can be prepared. If the goal of the bill is to expand access to Maine made products and support education efforts, the Department recommends including language regarding produce that is *minimally processed*.

We look forward to continued conversations around LD 636 and will be happy to answer any questions during the work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Walter Beesley
Child Nutrition Director

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