



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association In Support of:  
LD 636: An Act To Encourage the Purchase of Local Foods for Public Schools**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Room 208, Cross State Office Building  
Wednesday, March 24, 2021

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. I am here today in support of LD 636: "An Act To Encourage the Purchase of Local Foods for Public Schools."

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 500 individual members and 30 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities and we take that responsibility seriously.

This bill expands the scope of the Department of Education's Local Produce Fund by renaming it the Local Foods Fund and increases maximum state match levels. It expands the scope by allowing purchases of value-added dairy and protein and allows purchases from local food processors and food service distributors.

MPHA supports the provisions in this bill because they increase access to nutritious foods for Maine schoolchildren, and support Maine farms and local food systems. Research into Farm to School Networks has found them to be successful. [County Health Rankings](#) has published an overview of these findings. For example, surveys suggest that producers are motivated to sell produce to local schools both to increase profits as well as to improve community nutrition and increase students' awareness of agricultural practices.<sup>1,2</sup> Farm to School programs also translate to positive behaviors outside of the school system. Parent surveys show that after exposure to Farm to School programs, children are more likely to request fruits and vegetables at home.<sup>3</sup>

We believe the provisions in this bill will improve health equity and health outcomes for people in Maine. Thus, MPHA supports LD 636, and we respectfully ask you to vote "Ought to Pass." Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup>Rosenberg N, Truong NL, Russell T, et al. Farmers' perceptions of local food procurement, Mississippi, 2013. *Preventing Chronic Disease*. 2014;11:140004.

<sup>2</sup>Conner D, King B, Kolodinsky J, et al. You can know your school and feed it too: Vermont farmers' motivations and distribution practices in direct sales to school food services. *Agriculture and Human Values*. 2012;29(3):321-332.

<sup>3</sup>Jones SJ, Childers C, Weaver AT, Ball J. SC farm-to-school programs encourages children to consume vegetables. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*. 2015;10(4):511-525.