

**LD 636: An Act To Encourage the Purchase of Local Foods for Public Schools**  
**Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Representative Michael Brennan and other esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Colleen Donlan and I live in Portland, ME. On behalf of Food Fuels Learning, I am testifying in support of LD 636, An Act to Encourage the Purchase of Local Food for Public Schools.

Food Fuels Learning is a network of committed stakeholders working to build food security in Portland Public Schools convened by the Cumberland County Food Security Council. We believe all students have the right to nutritious, culturally appropriate food that allows them to attain their full potential. Expanding the incentives for food service programs at public schools to purchase local produce, dairy products, and proteins, supports Maine's farming community and provides healthy options for students. Partnering with local producers can also create experiential learning opportunities, such as increased participation in school gardens, support nutrition and cooking programs, and increase exposure to local farms.

With support from the Local Produce Fund and other resources, Portland Public Schools (PPS) has developed strong partnerships with local producers. During the 2019 and 2020 growing seasons, PPS purchased over 15,000 pounds of local produce from Liberation Farms, the marketing cooperative of the Somali Bantu Community Association of Maine. The tomatoes, beets, zucchini, leeks and carrots purchased were integrated into their marinara sauce recipe. This relationship has created a reliable market for the network of Somali Bantu farmers at Liberation Farms and provides students with delicious, healthy meal options.

Resources for local food purchasing supports food service programs. Public school food service budgets are extremely tight and depend on participation from students. In a food systems project at King Middle School in Portland, student researchers found that students wanted more local, fresh food in their school meals. Additional funding for local food could increase participation in school meals, providing additional funds for schools to purchase fresh, local ingredients beyond the Local Food Fund.

Adding more resources to the Local Food Fund and expanding its reach to dairy and meat products will strengthen current farm to school programs across Maine and encourage other schools to connect with local producers. Food Fuels Learning urges you to join us in support of LD 636. Please reach out to [info@ccfoodsecurity.org](mailto:info@ccfoodsecurity.org) with any questions.

