



Testimony in support of LD 636, An Act To Encourage the Purchase of Local Foods for Public Schools

March 24, 2021

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Amy Gallant and I am the Vice President of Public Policy and Research for Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. We have a network of more than 500 partner agencies, supporting our mission to eliminate hunger in Maine by improving access to nutritious food for people in need, building strong community partnerships, and mobilizing the public in the fight to end hunger. Last year, through our network, we distributed 27 million meals across the entire state.

We are here today to support LD 636, An Act To Encourage the Purchase of Local Foods for Public Schools. This bill allows schools to source local foods from sources in addition to farms, increases the DOE reimbursement to encourage additional local purchasing, and expands the currently allowed produce to include other local foods.

In 1997, the USDA began a comprehensive effort to connect farms to schools. This initiative boosts local economies and supports smaller-scale local farms, reduces the environmental impacts of out-of-state food transportation and distribution, and provides the potential to connect students to local agriculture. A few years ago I accompanied a class to a rooftop farm. The farmer was washing carrots, and one of the students asked why the carrots were dirty. The farmer replied that he had just pulled them out of the ground. The child replied, why do you keep your carrots in the ground? My mom keeps our carrots in the fridge! This story is cute and funny, and demonstrative of the disconnect between us and our food.

The challenges of increasing local food in schools include cost and logistical challenges such as coordination with farms, staffing lunchrooms, and processing raw ingredients into school meals. Despite these challenges, providing schools with locally procured food remains a high priority for many districts, and this bill is a step in the right direction.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Amy Gallant

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