

Dear Senator Rafferty,

My name is Ryan Parker, I am a lifelong Mainer, the Maine Associate Director of Programs for FoodCorps, a school board member, and likely the person in Maine with the most experience helping schools deal with food waste.

I am writing to offer my services, such as they are, during your work session, or if you have any questions about how LD 655 would address some of the major issues plaguing our education system.

As one of Maine's experts on school food waste, I have many years experience witnessing first hand how our current system of extremely short lunch periods literally impacts the cost of education, and the ability of our children to learn and develop. Having been invited into many of our state's schools as a consultant, I have presented to dining services directors, cafeteria managers, superintendents, detailed reports outlining problems I observed, as well as details on solutions to those problems, and how to implement them. I have seen, and shared with these same people, countless examples of students having too little time to eat. In fact, I have shared video footage of children being forced to get up from their tables before finishing, standing in a line

inching closer to the trash cans, trying to hold a full tray in one hand and cram as much of their as yet uneaten food into their mouths before reaching the disposal area. I am happy to discuss these realities, and how LD 655 would alleviate these costs, both in terms of human costs, and financial costs, both of which are staggering.

Additionally, I am writing to you as a school board member in my own community. With all due respect to Mr. Bailey, I was disturbed by his testimony, especially in his representation that school boards and superintendents are opposed to this legislation. Our board, which is one of the largest and most representative in Maine with 19 members representing 8 communities, has not debated this bill. It has not come up in any of our meetings nor, as far as I am aware, are any of my fellow board members aware this bill is being considered. Like nearly everything every school board considers, there would likely be some members in favor and some members opposed if the bill's existence were to become a topic of discussion at our meetings. After reading Mr. Bailey's testimony I checked with our school board chair and our superintendent. Neither had heard from Mr. Bailey, or his organization, about this bill, nor had either offered to him support or opposition of their own volition. The chair of our board is

connected in network with several other board chairs, as is our superintendent to his colleagues. To their knowledge, none of their peers had been given the chance to weigh in on LD 655 either. If you would like to hear from an actual school board member, I am happy to participate in your work session and offer my perspective.

Specifically, I am disturbed by comments that this bill would wrestle away local control. As a lifelong Mainer, a farmer, and a generally stubborn man, I value local control and sovereignty. However, my years-long experience on my school board highlights the fact that local school boards and taxpayers actually have very little local control when it comes to education. Almost everything about our education system, from special education, to school meals, to number of contact hours, to the very funding we must raise as local taxpayers in order to be eligible for the state's mandatory financial contribution to education, is controlled by the state, or federal government. This bill would undoubtedly create challenges for our administrators throughout the state, specifically in terms of scheduling. The question becomes, would the benefits of the law, in this case substantially decreased financial costs associated with the hauling to landfills of heavy (our hauling contracts are based on weight and

frequency of pick-up) food waste, and decreased hunger amongst Maine's children, who before Covid, already suffered from the highest rate of food insecurity in New England (a situation that leads to slower development, lowered learning outcomes, lowered impulse control, all of which have staggering economic impacts for our state as these children enter adulthood), outweigh the costs. The answer is, demonstrably, yes. The other question should be, if this is good policy, which it is, how can we as a state support these schools, and give them the tools they need to ensure our kids are getting enough to eat, and that we are not wasting thousands of dollars purchasing and preparing food that cannot be eaten, let alone thousands of dollars to then haul that perfectly good food away to a landfill, and thousands of dollars trying to alleviate behavior and learning problems that arise because too many of our kids are starving.

Again, I thank you for considering this bill, and I am happy to offer any additional information during your work session, or elsewhere. I have included Mr. Baker in this message, and shared this letter with your Committee colleagues.

Thank you for all you do for Maine and your communities.