

## **Testimony of Martha Poliquin, Falmouth Public Schools In Support of LD 636**

Senator Vitelli and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Martha Poliquin. I am the School Nutrition Director for Falmouth Public Schools serving Falmouth, Maine and am a resident of Lisbon, Maine.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 636, an act to expand the Local Produce Fund to include other Maine grown and produced foods and other avenues of procurement beyond produce purchased directly from farmers. Thank you for your commitment to addressing childhood hunger in Maine.

I've worked in school nutrition in Maine for 25 years. In every school district I've worked for, we've purchased locally grown and produced fruits, vegetables, milk, beef, eggs, chicken, and seafood. We started with small purchases for special occasions like Maine Harvest Lunch Day, which has grown into Maine Harvest Lunch Week and now is Maine Harvest of the Month. We have seen that incorporating Maine grown, raised, and processed food has increased the nutritional value of our meals, increased student participation in our programs, and supported the local farming and fishing economy. Local purchases are now a regular part of our weekly food procurement practice. Falmouth has been fortunate in southern Maine to establish some great relationships with vegetable, fruit, and beef growers who we can purchase from directly - Sweetser's Orchard, Little Ridge Farm, Fresh Start Farm, Archer Angus Beef, Crystal Spring Farm. And we have recently started buying fresh yogurt from The Milkhouse. We also source local products through distributors such as Sysco of Northern New England, Northcenter PFG, Crown O' Maine, Maine Family Farms, and Native Maine Produce. We use all of these opportunities to support Maine farmers and businesses, feed our students great food, and fulfill our procurement obligation to "open and fair competition".

We are thankful for the Local Produce Fund because it has encouraged us to purchase and has helped reduce the overall cost of local produce. But currently the Local Produce Fund only reimburses for produce purchased directly from a farmer. Being reimbursed for more of the local foods we use in our school breakfast and lunches would be extremely helpful to our financial viability. Additionally, many of my school nutrition colleagues do not have good or easy direct access to locally grown foods. They struggle with finding farms in their area who will deliver to them or have the capacity to grow for a school. For some farmers it is easier for them to negotiate a large sale with one vendor and deliver to one location, a distributor, knowing that their food will be available to many buyers. Allowing reimbursement for purchases through distribution companies benefits farmers and school nutrition.

Please support this bill. LD 636 would expand school nutrition programs' access, affordability, and variety of local products which would support more farmers and get more nutritious Maine food onto the lunch trays of our hungry students. Thank you for your time and work and commitment to Maine's children. I'm happy to answer any questions they have.

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