



LEWISTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Testimony of Alisa Roman, Maine School Nutrition Association President and Director of Nutrition and Transportation Lewiston Public Schools

In Support of LD 636

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Alisa Roman I am a resident of Winthrop and the President of the Maine School Nutrition Association serving members of the State of Maine, and the Director of Nutrition and Transportation for Lewiston Public Schools.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 636. I want to thank the bill sponsors for your commitment to addressing childhood hunger in Maine.

Lewiston Public Schools has an enrollment close to 5,500 students. The Nutrition Program offers complimentary (Free) meals to all students and children in the community age 18 and under. We participate in the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision and offer Breakfast, Lunch, Fresh Fruit and Veggie Program, and at risk supper, as well as participate in Summer Food Service Programs. We have 7 kitchens in the district and spend close to 2.5 million dollars a year on food purchases to feed everyone. Our program is run 100% on Federal and State monies with negligible amount coming from the local tax share. As of this year 20-21 99.15% of all families qualify for free and reduced meals under the Community Eligibility Provision we participate in.

From my research there are approximately 7,000 plus designated farm operations in the in the state of Maine. While this figure includes Milk, hay, Oats, Cattle, Hogs, Barley, maple Syrup, Corn, Potatoes, Apples and Cauliflower; it also includes crops which are used in farmers markets, food banks, pantries, grocery stores and schools. As a School operator Farm to School just makes sense. Support local farms, support the farmer's families, and support local agriculture.

The problem though is that being a federal and state subsidized program I am charged to be fiscally viable to make sure the burden of operating my program is not put directly on the community that is not in a place to support the full fiscal weight. A carrot operation in California that has a longer season, large distribution chains, packaging facilities, and a strong workforce has the ability to price their carrot lower than any Maine grown product. As a buyer that leaves me to spend my dollars a food item that has traveled over 3,500 miles to reach a student's plate.

The State of Maine has had a local food fund for many years. I have happily participated in this program to support local farmers. But, the money allotted to my district can be spent by just one of my schools in a month. The purposed local food bill in front of you represents a chance for Maine to reallocate its buying power back to the local farmers and in turn community. In the 1990's farm to table hit main stream in California restaurants and schools funded their farmers and gave buying power to the State. It has flourished and created a healthier farm to table culture that has spread across the country. Maine is in the position to do the same.

While this bill represents just a drop of what Maine can do I know that our largest classroom in the State is in the cafeteria. Students that are exposed to local, learn from farmers, and eat their food will grow up to seek out these services as adults. The impact to funding this bill will be lifelong for our youngest Mainers. Those that grow up and move out of State will have fond memories of the local food network and remember this creating the market that is required to sustain the farmers both in and out of the State.

The bill as written before you today expands the buying power of schools, provides financing to make the purchases happen long term, and allows our most sheltered and inaccessible community's access to the food produced in the State.

I hope you too can support LD 636. If you have any further questions please feel free to reach out to me.

Alisa Roman

President Maine School Nutrition Association
Director of Nutrition and Transportation Lewiston Public Schools

