

**Testimony of Caroline Trinder, RSU 23  
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 Caroline Trinder. I am the School Nutrition Director for RSU 23 in Old Orchard Beach and I'm a Registered Dietitian. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the changes proposed in the Local Produce Fund legislation.

As a School Nutrition Director, I try my best to offer fresh, local produce as often as I can. Being the director in a small district, I am the sole administrator in my department, with no assistant of any sort. Due to this, I have many tasks to complete each day and many hats to wear. Unfortunately, this has prevented me from accessing the Local Produce Fund before due to some of the requirements in the bill as it is currently written. As it currently stands, I have to purchase the produce directly from a farm. While I absolutely understand the goal behind this, I simply don't have the capacity to work with multiple farms each year to purchase the different types of produce I'd like to offer. Instead, I resort to Sysco and Native Maine to provide me with local produce as a distributor. They take the work out of having to add a new vendor to our Accounts Payable department (and all that goes with that such as acquiring W-9 forms). Using a distributor also makes my life, and the farmer's life, significantly easier as there is no need to set up new delivery times that work for everyone. We already have delivery days and times set up each week with our distributors.

I worked in the School Nutrition Department of a very large district in Florida before assuming my current role. We purchased all of our local produce through our distributors, but were able to specify which farms we wanted our produce from. We actually purchased so much hydroponic bib lettuce from a local farmer through our produce distributor that the farmer was able to build an additional 5,000 sq ft facility just to grow our lettuce! It was incredible to see what an impact a school nutrition program could have on a local farmer!

I strongly encourage you to vote in support of the changes to this bill to allow us to work with distributors. It will allow us to buy locally (maybe more than we already are) and serve local, fresh produce to our students across the state without adding multiple hurdles that have prevented many districts from accessing this fund before.

In addition to allowing us to purchase from farms through distributors, I think it is also important to allow this funding to be used for local proteins and dairy products. Many schools across the state participate in a Harvest of the Month program. March is Maine Protein Month. Last March, before Covid, we purchased local beef- in the forms of

shaved beef and hamburger patties- and served local cheesesteak sandwiches and local burgers. They were a huge hit and helped us support our local industries.

Right now, the Local Produce Fund only allows us to receive funding for purchasing produce. I would highly recommend that this is changed to allow us to purchase local proteins and dairy as well. There are many local cattle farmers, dairies, and fishermen who we could purchase from to receive our incentive, but imagine how much this would also help them! In addition to helping our local economy, imagine how happy parents would be knowing so much of their child's school meal was coming from local places. Instead of us ordering frozen burger patties from somewhere else in the US, we'd be able to offer fresh beef right here in our schools and know exactly where it came from!

It's funny to sit back and think about it, but school nutrition programs are likely the "biggest restaurant chain" in all of Maine! We have so many schools and feed so many children most days of the year, that allowing us to purchase from all farmers could truly help our neighbors down the road in ways we couldn't possibly imagine.

In closing, I urge the committee to vote in support of this bill.