

TESTIMONY

In support of

LD 961: “An Act to Provide Equity in Access to Applications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program”

Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on
Education and Cultural Affairs
April 26th, 2021**

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

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher, National Board Certified, on leave from Greely High School while serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA has nearly 24,000 members—faculty and staff in our pre-K-12 public schools, our institutions of higher education, and many dedicated retired educators.

I am speaking on behalf of our members in support of LD 961: “An Act to Provide Equity in Access to Applications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program”.

The two words most frequently used over the past thirteen months have been ‘safety’ and ‘equity’.

Alright, maybe that is not an actual announcement from Merriam Webster. But these two words certainly have been frequently used by many of us, or at least by me.

And we all have transitioned to using technology and the internet for many more of our day-to-day activities and to address many of our needs.

LD 961 makes the application for free or reduced-price meals much more readily available by having it on the Department of Education’s publicly accessible website. LD 961 also will have the Department of Education develop versions in various languages. Both of these components of LD 961 provide not only greater equity but also greater convenience for the families of Maine’s students. When school districts also make the application available on their district website, the equity and convenience are enhanced all the more.

It has been my experience that too many families do not apply for free or reduced-priced meals even when they qualify, either because of the perceived stigma when a student returns the paper application or the application never makes its way home with the student after being distributed in school. Not only does this mean the student may not access meals at school that they need, but it also affects federal funding for the district that they might otherwise be entitled to receive.

While the United States Department of Agriculture just recently extended universal free school meals through the coming school year¹, other things depend on and are determined by the percentage of applications for free and reduced meals in a district such as Title I funds.

Going forward, passage of LD 961 will be beneficial not only to our students who qualify for free/reduced meals, but to our school districts in general.

We urge your support of LD 961.

Thank you for your time, and feel free to contact me with any questions.

Grace Leavitt

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¹<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/04/20/usda-extends-universal-free-lunch/>

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