

## **Testimony of Keagen Becvar, Poland Regional High School In Support of LD 1679**

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Keagen Becvar. I am a resident of Mechanic Falls and a junior at Poland Regional High School.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 1679 An Act to Address Student Hunger Through Expanding Access to Free School Meals. I want to thank the bill sponsors for your commitment to addressing childhood hunger in Maine.

For me, addressing school hunger hits close to home. Growing up, it was just me, my mom and brother. For years we bounced from house to house while my mom bounced from job to job. Along the way, not only was it difficult adjusting to a new school every year, I often didn't know if I would have school lunch. The only way I was guaranteed a meal was free school lunch, but I hated feeling like I was the only one. As I have gotten older, I have noticed that my family wasn't the only one with this problem. I often see students at my school who don't get breakfast or lunch. Not only do I not want others to feel the way I have, but I also think it is important to make sure all kids have access to a warm meal without cost.

After learning more about the bill, I believe expanding access to free school meals would work in Maine for the following reasons. First, people who can't afford a school lunch have to go through shame daily because they see other kids eating while they just have to sit there. Second, there is currently a requirement to submit paperwork to get free lunch. This is an issue because not only do the lunch staff see it and bother students to collect it, but other students and friends know because they see you handing it in. Third, many kids come to school on an empty stomach making it hard to focus on schoolwork. This ultimately leads to poor testing, lack of attention in class, and results in failing grades. Therefore, I believe implementing a program to expand access to free school meals will decrease the shame and stress around submitting paperwork, help students achieve better grades in school, and have a more nutrient and well balanced meal. Lastly, due to COVID, all students are currently able to get free breakfast and lunch. From my perspective, it is much easier to navigate, my peers and I do not have to worry about missing a meal, and it seems to be an easy process to navigate.

In addition to providing easier access for all kids to have adequate meals, schools do not have to work tirelessly to submit for reimbursement from the federal government. Even when they do that, the amount they receive is a fraction of the total cost per meal. In Finland, through a diverse food education agenda, they have had a free lunch program for students since 1948. The Borgen Project states that since applying the free lunch program, Finland has had the fourth lowest poverty rate for over 50 years. Not only does it help ensure all

students get food, it helps bring the community together through a warm meal, and they have incorporated student cooking programs to allow a hands-on approach to learning how to make a healthy balanced meal. Finland's goal is to make the world's best school meals even better. They have done it successfully for many years, so what is stopping us from doing the same?

In conclusion, I am in support of Maine putting into place LD 1679 An Act to Address Student Hunger Through Expanding Access to Free School Meals. because we have not only seen the positive impact it has made on students' lives across the state this year, but Finland is living proof that it can be effective. Thank you for listening, I hope you consider An Act to Address Student Hunger Through Expanding Access to Free School Meals. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Keagen Becvar  
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Video of testimony: <https://youtu.be/fAiUOfNQy4Y>