



STATE OF MAINE DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
23 STATE
HOUSE STATION AUGUSTA, ME
04333-0023

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

PENDER MAKIN
COMMISSIONER

May 20, 2021

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Co-chair
Representative Michael Brennan, Co-chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Committee,

LD 1679, An Act To Address Student Hunger through Expanding Access to Free School Meals provides free meals to all public-school children, regardless of socio-economic status. The Department supports the intent of the bill and believes providing meals at no-cost to students will ensure all students will have unfettered access to nutritious meals throughout the school year. Enactment of the bill will reduce school costs incurred at the local level for staff working to collect past due accounts and unpaid account balances. Meal benefit applications remain a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requirement.

Currently, free and reduced student meals are covered by Federal and State reimbursement at approximately \$2.00 per student breakfast and \$3.70 per student lunch. Last year the Department recruited and hired an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer to focus on the realization of a statewide universal feeding program. Using data collected during the pandemic, the Department estimates a total cost of \$34 million dollars, with approximately \$30.2 million required for lunch and \$3.8 million required for breakfast. The Department utilized 2020-2021 school year data because currently all students are receiving complimentary meals, as a result of USDA pandemic related waivers. This year's data provides an estimate of the number of students that are interested and willing to accept no-cost meals. It is important to keep in mind that there are many reasons a student may decide not to take advantage of a complementary meal. The Department recommends a language change in section 6 of the bill to address Special Provision programs, such as Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2.

The Department has secured a USDA waiver to provide free meals to students during the upcoming 2021-2022 school year. As a result, the Department recommends that LD 1679 be carried over for consideration by this Committee during the 130th Legislature's Second Regular Session.

The Maine Department of Education is happy to provide additional information regarding LD 1679 and answer questions during the upcoming work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Walter Beesley

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Walter Beesley

State Director, Child Nutrition

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