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## **Maine Community Action Partnership and Maine Head Start Directors Association Support LD 1679 An Act To Address Student Hunger through Expanding Access to Free School Meals**

**May 20, 2021**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Megan Hannan, I am the Executive Director of Maine Community Action Partnership and the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Association of Head Start Directors, and we support LD 1679 An Act To Address Student Hunger through Expanding Access to Free School Meals.

For more than 50 years, Community Action has served as a dynamic and community-based force in addressing the causes and conditions of poverty throughout Maine and the country. Our ten Community Action Agencies (CAAs) deliver programs and services for people with low- and moderate income, including the Home Energy Assistance Program, or HEAP; workforce development; the current rental relief program; Head Start and more. Above all, our Mission is about equity: in economic opportunity, education and the opportunity to succeed.

Nine of the 10 Maine CAAs run Head Start, Early Head Start and/or other childcare programs. Head Start programs have the advantage of providing all students nutritious food during the day: a morning and afternoon snack and lunch. Well fed children are better prepared to learn, play and develop emotionally with each other. That process should not stop when the child leaves that environment for public school.

We know Mainers are proud people. We know that we are only reaching a portion of Maine families who are eligible for free- and reduced-cost lunch at school. That program also entitles families to other nutrition programs like SNAP and, during the pandemic, increased funding loaded directly to the EBT card to make up for food children would normally be eating at school or in childcare. During this pandemic, school lunches are free to all: no stigma, so shame, no questions asked. As a matter of equity and inclusion, we should continue this program after the Federal directive ends.

Thank you for your time, I am happy to answer any questions you have now or for the work session.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Megan Hannan](#)  
Executive Director