

Testimony of Curtis Manchester, Lewiston Public Schools In Support of LD #1679

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Educational and Cultural Affairs. My name is Curtis Manchester. I am a resident of Lisbon Falls and Assistant Director of Nutrition with Lewiston Public Schools serving Lewiston.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD #1679. I want to thank the bill sponsors for your commitment to addressing childhood hunger in Maine.

As an employee of Lewiston Public Schools, I have worked in various kitchens, cafeterias, and in our District's administrative offices. For the entirety of the six years that I have worked for the Lewiston Nutrition Program, our district has qualified to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), a bill that allows school districts with a high enough number of Free and Reduced students to feed their entire student population for free. Because of the Community Eligibility Provision, we are allowed to multiply our 66% Free and Reduced students by 1.5%, making it so we can feed 99.15% of Lewiston Students for free.

The impact this has had on the students of Lewiston has been immense. As a District, we no longer have to worry about students going hungry because they have no lunch money. We no longer have to worry about lunch shaming because their parents can't afford to send them to school with lunch or because students have to eat the cheapest option. We don't have to take a full tray from a hungry student when they get to the register and realize they have no money on their account.

Food insecurity is a very real concern for many children in Maine. If we can pass LD #1679, we can all do our part to ensure that students from all over the state can have the same benefits that the students of Lewiston have grown to rely on. If we are demanding that children attend school to ensure a brighter future, then I firmly believe that we should provide them with everything they need to succeed once they step out of their front door; transportation, safety within the school building, and a nourishing meal that will help them be healthy and allow them to focus on what matters: learning.

I am hoping Maine can join California in providing Universal Free Lunches so we can lead the rest of the country into providing a service that should be provided to all children.

I would like to thank the co-chairs and committee for their time and commitment to Maine's children and let them know that I'm happy to answer any questions they may have.

Curtis Manchester
Assistant Director of Nutrition, Lewiston Public Schools