

## **Testimony of Ken Morse, Maine Food Policy Work Group In Support of LD 1679**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Ken Morse. I am a resident of Norway and I am the Coordinator of the Maine Food Policy Work Group which is a network of many food system groups advocating for good food policy in Maine. I also help coordinate the Maine Network of Community Food Councils which serves over 200 towns in Maine.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 1679. I want to thank the bill sponsors for working on this important initiative to address childhood hunger in Maine.

I grew up on an apple orchard in Waterford where we produced, stored, packed and shipped 40-50,000 bushels of apples each year. For the last 50 years, I've worked on community food systems, including food co-ops, farm to school and community food councils.

Given the health, environmental and climate failures of imported, industrial foods, I believe we need to bring our food system back home to Maine, and I've devoted much of my life to this goal. I served as first coordinator of the Maine's Farm to School Network which aims to grow a new generation of Mainers that are well fed by Maine foods and farms. Far too many Maine kids are hungry, with close to half being eligible for free school meals. And in some schools, 99% are eligible.

School Meals for All are a matter of health, equity and ability to learn. I believe free meals for all are as important as teachers, school facilities and equipment in nurturing future generations of Maine citizens. And these meals should be part of our social contract, much the way schools, highways and public safety are.

School Meals for All are not just a matter of student health and equity, they would also make the whole school nutrition program work better, streamlining paper work and eliminating school lunch debt which hits poorer districts disproportionately. Both students and schools would be healthier, and child development and learning would be improved. Hungry children can't learn, and indebted schools can't teach as well.

While I believe the USDA should provide school meals for all, Maine can't wait for this to happen. Once again, Maine can be a progressive leader in solving childhood hunger.

I strongly urge the Committee to support LD 1679. Thanks for all you do improve the lives and learning of Maine children and hope that you will work to fight childhood hunger in Maine.

*Ken Morse  
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