

Testimony of Martha Poliquin, Falmouth Public Schools, 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 Martha Poliquin. I live in Lisbon and I'm the School Nutrition Director for Falmouth Public Schools, serving Falmouth, Maine.

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.

I have 25 years experience working in school nutrition in 4 different school districts. One of my responsibilities as a school nutrition director is to be the Approving Officer for meal benefit applications. I see the families that don't meet the income guidelines to qualify for free or reduced price meals but struggle to feed their children. They often send their children to school without breakfast and with minimal bagged lunches or they get our breakfasts and lunches and ring up a large debt with our program. For 25 years I've seen the labels of shame and embarrassment that parents apply to themselves when they qualify for free or reduced price meals. I've seen how they try to hide it from their children. I've seen how families try to look as successful as their neighbors when they aren't, due to circumstances beyond their control. In a community like Falmouth, that is seen as affluent, there is an assumption that everyone is doing well. That's not the case.

During the pandemic, it has been an absolute honor and joy to be able to feed children our nutritious meals free of charge through USDA waivers, no questions asked, no debt incurred!!! I know we are reaching families who didn't get school meals in the past. When we feed all children regardless of family finances, we level the food access field for children in school. A well fed child is ready to learn and has the best chance nutritionally to reach their full potential as a member of our community and state. Isn't that what we want?

While the USDA has announced additional waivers to allow us to feed students free of charge for the 2021-2022 school year, it's not a guarantee of future funding. We have an incredible opportunity right now with so much aid coming to our state to dedicate funds to support School Meals for All in Maine; to really put our money where our hearts and minds are. Maine has

the opportunity to lead the nation in this!

Please support the passage and funding of LD 1679 to make School Meals for All a reality. We often say "our children are our future". I hope that you agree with that statement. Let's please make their well nourished lives a priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this very important issue. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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