

Testimony of Alisa Roman, Lewiston 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 Alisa Roman. I am a resident of Winthrop and the Director of Nutrition and Transportation with Lewiston Public Schools and the President of the Maine School Nutrition Association.

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.

In 2016 Lewiston Public Schools was able to give Free meals to all students prek-12 regardless of financial standing due to the Community Eligibility Provision. Because of the provision the stigma of school lunch free, reduced, and paid categories disappeared. I did not hear the sad stories of parents sending their children to school with a bag of chips to sustain them for the next 7.5 hours because they could not afford the price of a meal. Student debt disappeared and I was financially able to balance the budget without assistance from the general fund.

In 2020 the COVID pandemic changed the landscape of child nutrition in the state of Maine. With multiple federal waivers in place the State of Maine was able to provide free meals to all students in the state of Maine regardless of financial background, and physical location.

We can say with confidence that access to school meals has increased by Child Nutrition programs being able to provide complimentary meals. Collection of monies through teachers and other school personnel has stopped a confidentiality and timing issue in most schools. Students' learning and attention have increased and nurse visits due to lack of nutrition have dropped.

This is a community and State issue. Students whose basic needs are taken care of should be part of the Social-emotional learning that we are focusing on in the State. Food is part of an equitable learning environment. We know that students who are provided an equitable learning environment are more likely to show up to school that testing and retention are increased.

I am concerned that if Maine is to wait until the Federal programs evaluate and adopt Universal Meals we may see precious momentum towards childhood hunger be affected. In a district, that is 99.155 Free and Reduced it is not okay to leave anyone in limbo. If we fail to pass legislation to take care of Maines Students at this most basic level we have failed to provide them with adequate resources for their education.

We should not have to look to other states or the federal government for approval to do what we know is right for the students and families in the state of Maine.

Thank you again for your commitment to Maine families and Schools. I am happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Alisa Roman
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