



**Testimony in Support of LD 1002,
An Act to Require a Lunch Period of at Least 30 Minutes for Students and Reduce Food
Waste**

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Vanessa Berry. I am the Sustainable Maine Outreach Coordinator for the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1002.

My role within NRCM allows me the distinct pleasure of getting to work directly with Maine students at every level, from Pre-K to post-secondary, to address sustainability challenges and find meaningful solutions that support Maine people and our environment. Our work with schools is often rooted in food waste and recycling education, and my role often gets messy as I put on a thick pair of gloves and my muck boots to sort through classroom and cafeteria trash bins. This part of my work allows me to teach students about the environmental impacts of throwing uneaten food and single-use plastics “away” and offer alternative solutions that can spare these items from a permanent home in one of Maine’s landfills.

I’ve learned from years of sorting through countless black trash bags of broken crayons, spaghetti sauce, discarded apples, and missing homework assignments that, when measured by weight, food waste typically makes up more than 70 percent of a school’s trash. Within that 70 percent, give-or-take, are dozens of uneaten apples, unopened bags of carrots, and whole milk cartons. When we consider the fact that one out of four Maine students is at risk of going hungry ([Maine DOE](#)), LD 1002 feels like an opportunity for Maine schools to become food waste superheroes and rescue this food from an untimely end and give it to those most vulnerable in our communities.

One of the largest barriers in addressing food waste in schools is the limit of time for students to eat the food on their trays. In many schools, including many of the schools I attended as a child, there is only 20 minutes allotted for lunch. These 20 minutes typically include the time needed to pack up in the classroom, assemble children into an orderly line to walk to the cafeteria, waiting in another line to be served, and then finding a seat at a table with friends. For many students, this is one of the only times during their day to socialize with peers, and many Maine children are still just learning how to balance the remaining 10 minutes of lunch between discussions about yesterday’s cartoons and taking bites of stuffed crust pizza and carrot sticks before being asked to empty their tray and scurry off to outdoor recess.

Extending the lunch time in Maine schools allows students more time to eat the food on their trays, reducing wasted food and ensuring that all students, especially those who rely on school meals, have adequate nutrition to power through the day. LD 1002 addresses two large sources of food waste in schools by encouraging students to eat the food they take, while also providing a designated place for food that is left behind to become a resource for kids in need. Thank you for the opportunity to show our support, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.