



To: The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Elise Hartill, Food Sovereignty Cohort Co-Lead of Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: 03/21/2023

Re: Testimony in favor of LD 1002

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and the honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Elise Hartill and I am writing as a representative for the Food Sovereignty Cohort housed by Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 450 youth from across the state who are fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. I am writing in favor of LD 1002, “An Act To Require A Lunch Period of at Least 30 Minutes for Students and Reduce Food Waste.”

You might be wondering why a climate justice organization is interested in legislation regarding the length of school lunch - our reasoning is twofold: the youth are our future and they deserve to be set up for success at school, and research shows that allowing for a longer lunch period, preceded by recess, results in greater consumption of nutritious foods and less food waste. Reducing food waste is a critical part of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to fight the climate crisis.

On a personal note, I was baffled to hear that students in Maine had lunch periods that were shorter than 30 minutes. I’ve also been confused about why the school day ends so early in Maine. I graduated from high school in 2012, and I went to a public high school in southern California, and before that my family lived in Washington D.C. and Ottawa, Canada. At every school I attended, the lunch period was at least 45 minutes long. In California, we had enough time to leave campus and stand in a line at a fast food restaurant, eat there, and return to campus, all before the bell rang. It allowed not only enough time for proper nutrition, but also for socializing and moving our bodies, which as a fellow human being, I’m sure you all recognize the importance of. I understand the difficulty of scheduling a school day that works for every student in a rural state like Maine, and I’m not suggesting that what worked in a large

city will work here. What I am saying is that school lunch and recess should not be where we compromise. Every student deserves to move their bodies, socialize, and nourish their bodies.

Full Plates Full Potential, an organization we are allied with, conducted two surveys in Maine: one of students, parents, and community members; and another of school administrators. They received 101 responses from students, parents, and community members and 174 responses from school administrators. They found that 77% of students surveyed report that they don't have enough time to eat lunch at school, and 65% of those students named long lunch lines as the main issue. 83% of parents and guardians and 76% of other school and community members surveyed say that students do not have enough time to eat. These are staggering numbers that are echoed by MYCJ's own youth climate activists in Maine.

There are many talking points to support this bill that are research-backed and confirmed by the lived-experience of students: a hungry child can't learn, research shows that the last student in the lunch line has less than 10 minutes to eat, healthy choices like raw vegetables take longer to eat and not enough time to eat creates food waste, etc... School meals are more important than ever, households across our state are struggling with rising costs and the end of covid-era assistance like extra SNAP dollars leading to increased food insecurity. As a youth climate justice organization, we believe that we cannot move into a better future while reproducing the same oppressive systems of the past and present. Food justice is a part of that mission, and Maine's youth deserve to be nourished and healthy, in body, mind and spirit.

For the above reasons, our coalition, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, urges you to vote to pass LD 1002. Thank you.