



March 22, 2023

Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine testimony to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs in support of LD 1002, An Act to Require a Lunch Period of at Least 30 Minutes for Students and Reduce Food Waste

To Chairperson Rafferty, Chairperson Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Rebekah Lane and I am the Community Organizer for Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. I am here today to express our support, and ask for your support, of LD 1002, An Act to Require a Lunch Period of at Least 30 Minutes for Students and Reduce Food Waste.

The mission of Good Shepherd Food Bank is to eliminate hunger in Maine by improving access to nutritious food for people in need, building strong community partnerships, and mobilizing the public in the fight to end hunger. Good Shepherd Food Bank works in partnership with nearly 600 organizations to help distribute food to community members in need. Our network of partner agencies includes food pantries, meal sites, senior centers, school programs, and healthcare facilities. In our work centering equity, we are increasingly working with communities of color to address food security in a culturally responsive way.

Research shows that the healthiest meals that children eat come from school nutrition programs. These meals have less empty calories and include more milk, fruit, vegetables, and fiber. For most children, especially those living in food insecure households, 30-50% of their daily calories are consumed during school lunch.

Currently students in Maine have between two to twelve minutes to eat during a school lunch period, depending on where they are in the lunch line, if they were dismissed late, how long it took them to put on or take off any necessary outdoor gear, or any other delay, none of which are within the child's control but greatly impact their ability to consume a nutritious meal. These time constraints result in students choosing calorie dense food over nutrient dense food options. How many of us have been in a similar situation, where the handful of crackers, that has twice the calories and little to no fiber, gets chosen over the fresh crisp apple purely because we have five minutes or less to get something into our bellies before moving on to the next part of our day?

As a parent, I have seen how these short lunch times impact my own two children, now eight and twelve years old. During their time in the public school system we have had to rely heavily on the school nutrition program, with periods of food insecurity that have meant that they were the kids getting 50% or more of their daily calories from their school lunch. We are lucky to be a part of a small school, where staff were aware of their increased need and accommodated it whenever possible, but luck shouldn't be a factor in a child getting the food they need or having time to eat it.

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Both of my children still often come home hungry after school and very rarely is it because they didn't like the food on their tray. Yet again, they have luck on their side and are in a school that offers a wide range of daily options, local produce and products whenever possible, and scratch made items that appeal to children while being packed full of needed nutrients. They come home hungry because the daily salad bar line takes longer to get through, the carrots that they grew themselves in the student-tended garden take longer to consume, and the break that their brain needs from learning make deciding which item to start eating first a sometimes daunting decision.

We believe there is a solution to the problem of hunger in Maine. Working in partnership with the state legislature we can and will help reduce the impact of hunger in our state and make Maine a stronger, better place for our children to grow up. We have seen this partnership ensure that all children in the public school system have access to healthy meals regardless of ability to pay and we ask that it extends to include the time necessary to eat these healthy meals.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

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