



**March 22, 2023**

**Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

**Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,**

My name is Ryan Parker, and I am the Maine Impact and Partnerships Lead at FoodCorps. I am a lifelong Mainer and I live in Newport with my family where I serve, or have served, on several committees, including the Town of Newport Recycling Committee, a Newport Rec Committee, The Newport Economic Development Corporation and, perhaps most relevantly, I am a member of the RSU 19 School Board. I am writing to ask you to support passage of LD 1002 An Act to Require a Lunch Period of at Least 30 Minutes for Students and Reduce Food Waste.

FoodCorps is a national nonprofit organization that partners with schools to provide students with nourishing meals and food education that set them up to thrive for a lifetime. For the past 12 years, we have worked with Maine communities from the Katahdin Region to Portland, Indian Township to Eustis, to place emerging leaders in schools to provide hands-on lessons that get students excited about eating fruits and vegetables and support school nutrition staff in getting nourishing meals on the lunch tray.

Prior to my work with FoodCorps, I have been a commercial farmer who built a start-up farm business with only 6 customers into the state's largest year round Community Supported Agriculture Program. I also spent time working with an environmental organization where I focused almost exclusively on school food waste reduction, including designing a study, at the time one of only three nationally, to measure the amount of food waste being produced by students in schools, and develop solutions to reduce that amount. Our study, which included data from several schools over several months with different menu cycles, found that the average student in Maine produces 36.5 pounds of food waste per year. This amount fell exactly between the findings of the two other national studies, which had fewer data points over a much shorter time period. All of this is true while simultaneously, Maine has one of the highest rates of childhood food insecurity in the country.

One of the leading mechanisms to prevent children from wasting food, thereby increasing the amount of food and nutrition they get, is to increase the length of time they have to eat. Additional steps include ensuring recess is before lunch, changing the delivery methods to include plates instead of trays, and other steps.

The studies are clear. The most effective solutions are well documented. However, as a parent, school board member, and someone who focuses on school nutrition professionally, working in and with schools across Maine, I also recognize the difficulty of considering this legislation. As a school board member, I

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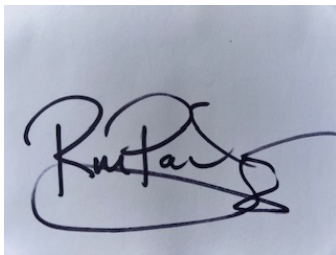
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am generally opposed to mandates from the state. But I also recognize one of the main reasons changing lunch schedules is such a problem is that our principals are already dealing with mandates from the state regarding classroom seat time. I have met only a small handful of school principals who support a minimum lunchtime (even as *all* school principals want their students to get the nutrition they need), while at the same time, I have yet to meet a School Nutrition Director who opposes this legislation because, simply put, it is absolutely needed. Washing our hands of this legislation every session it comes up because we want school districts to have local control does not acknowledge the reality that the professionals running our school programs actually have very little local control. It also does not provide us the tools we need to address the very real problem of children not getting enough to eat because they do not have enough time to eat what they are provided.

I submit humbly that I may be the person in the State of Maine with the most experience and focus on the specific problem of food waste in schools, having been hired for years as a consultant by school nutrition directors who want to improve their programs, having helped design one of the nation's three best studies on school food waste, and having written the book, literally, on school food waste reduction. I am happy to be a resource to the Committee, providing additional statistics, data, reports, and solutions to the problems that have led to the need for this legislation. I am also happy to be available to any Committee Members who may have additional questions, and to be a resource during your work sessions on this legislation.

I urge you to support the passage of LD 1002 An Act to Require a Lunch Period of at Least 30 Minutes for Students and Reduce Food Waste.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Ryan Parker".

Ryan Parker  
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