

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Senator Joseph Rafferty, Chair  
Representative Michael Brennan, Chair  
Cross Building Room 208  
Augusta ME 04333

Dear Chairmen Rafferty and Brennan and members of the Committee

The American Heart/Stroke Association supports **LD1002, "An Act to Require a Lunch Period of at Least 30 Minutes for Students and Reduce Food Waste"**. The American Heart Association is the largest voluntary health organization fighting to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

For almost two decades, the American Heart Association along with other health and food security partners have advocated to improve the school meals program at both the Federal and State level because we know that proper nutrition is critical to children's short- and long-term health outcomes. Food insecurity can lead to a variety of negative health conditions, including diet-related disease, and has severe consequences on a child's future health. Schools are a vital source of nutrition and are a bulwark against chronic food insecurity. Food insecurity is at an all-time high. This crisis has health, educational, and economic consequences, leaving children particularly vulnerable to the long-term impact.

We know that providing nutritious school meals will give all our kids a chance to thrive and succeed. Students who participate in school meals, particularly those who are experiencing food insecurity, have better health outcomes, have improved test scores, and are better able to concentrate in school and we know that a hungry child can't learn, unfortunately though we are not giving enough time for kids to eat lunch. Research has shown that the last student in line has 2-3 minutes to eat their lunch and healthy choices like raw vegetables take longer to consume. We also know that when there is not enough time to eat means more food waste. This bill would require Maine schools to allow at least 30 minutes to eat lunch as part of the National School Lunch Program. It also directs districts to allow adequate time for recess and to schedule recess before lunch, a best practice that encourages students to sit and eat lunch after fresh air and exercise. Districts are given the option to opt-out if a 30 minute lunch period and recess before lunch doesn't fit into their daily schedule. Many Maine schools already allow 30 minutes for lunch, so we should make this best practice a reality for students across our state.

Sincerely,  
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