

Ruby Van Dyk  
Portland Maine  
LD 1002

Testimony of Ruby Van Dyk, Casco Bay Highschool  
In Support of LD 1002

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Ruby Van Dyk. I am a resident of Portland, Maine, and a 10th-grade student at Casco Bay Highschool.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 1002 "An Act To Require A Lunch Period of at Least 30 Minutes for Students and Reduce Food Waste"

Over these past few years I have seen the population of the city of Portland change, grow, and mold into something truly amazing. With all these students needing to be supported every day, I have been somewhat pleasantly surprised at certain laws that are in place to protect and care for students, such as free breakfast and lunch. However, this is not nearly enough. 1 in 6 to 1 and 4 children face hunger in Maine, this percentage deserves equal care and attention. I have seen the lunch lines at my school, stretching across the entire hallway, and our building is not even equipped with enough staff or resources to deal with the number of students in need. Not only are 16.7%-25% of students going hungry, but a further 43% have reliance on school lunch each day. If these students are spending half of their time in line, more time finding a place to sit, and trying to enjoy the little leisure time they have to talk to friends, they are left with almost no time to eat. Eating lunch is of course a very important part of the school day, giving you the energy to finish out the remaining classes, but having time to relax and enjoy the company of others is also imperative to a highschoolers development. If these school lunch times are below the thirty-minute threshold, students often choose between a healthy meal and healthy relationships. Furthermore, as a member of my high school Green Team, I have faced the amount of food waste at school, which is appalling, to say the least. Around 30-40% of food produced in the US is never eaten, this waste directly contributes to climate change. Excess food waste increases greenhouse gas emissions, in fact, 6-8% of all greenhouse gas emissions could be cut by getting rid of food waste. While our small state of Maine may seem insignificant in this fight, I believe that based on the food waste at my school, cutting this could have a strong impact on our local environment. The piles upon piles of milk cartons, pizza slices, taco shells, apples, bananas, and dozens of other foods thrown away could be gone or at least dramatically reduced by a longer lunch period. Allowing children the time to finish their food while not worrying about what they are missing out on by eating is vital in the fight against food waste. Maine, as a state with extensive natural beauty and some of the most wonderful, as well as job-producing and profitable attractions, should pay close attention to these climate issues, as insignificant as they may seem on surface level. On a completely personal level, it is heartbreaking to have to see my fellow classmates forced to wait in line for almost entire lunch blocks. Even more saddening is the rising statistic on hunger in our state, something that I, as someone with generational experiences with hunger, would hope to see changed. My father faced hunger at school and home, and while I am not in a position where this is the case, I fully support any measures that could be taken to combat the pain that some children experience due to the horrific reality of childhood hunger.

Supporting this bill not only will bring focus, environmental consciousness, and less hungry students to our school system, but it will also support our communities for years to come.

Providing better education and brighter futures for those who in some ways, have been set up for struggle. Anything that our state can do to even the playing field, to no longer have childhood hunger be something that hinders success is a critical measure. All children should have equal opportunities. I unequivocally provide my support for this bill and hope all committee members will consider my points made. I am very happy to answer any questions you might have!

Ruby Van Dyk  
Portland