



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

In Support of

LD 1128: An Act to Address Student Hunger and Nutrition Through Expanded Access to Free Milk in Schools

Mallory Cook, Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement,

Maine Education Association

Before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

March 9, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and other esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Mallory Cook (pronouns she/her/hers), and I am the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement at the Maine Education Association, and a certified English teacher and Building Administrator. I am here to provide testimony in support of LD 1128: An Act to Address Student Hunger and Nutrition Through Expanded Access to Free Milk in Schools.

MEA represents approximately 24,000 educators across the state, including many food service workers. In a recent conversation, a Food Service Director voiced concerns about the amount of waste generated in her district's cafeterias. Per USDA requirements schools must offer five meal components, three of which must be taken for a student to qualify for a free meal through the National School Lunch Program. This is true even if a student just wants milk to accompany a bagged lunch from home. In other words, they are required to take two additional food items to gain access to free milk; otherwise, they must pay the a-la-carte price for the beverage. This is contributing to significant food waste and deterring students from taking milk. This food service worker said on average, at the district's one elementary school, 30 students request milk only.

Maine's commitment to providing universal access to free meals in schools is a tremendous step in the right direction when it comes to meeting the nutritional needs of our students; expanding that access to cover the cost of a milk-only option would alleviate unnecessary food waste, while providing a nutrient-dense drink option, an option we should be encouraging. The 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey demonstrated that only 7% of high schoolers and 9.6% of middle schoolers reported having the three recommended servings of milk per day. Adoption of this bill would ensure students have access to milk at least twice per day, hopefully increasing that number drastically.

Thank you for your consideration, and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

35 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330 | 1349 Broadway, Bangor, ME 04401
7 Hatch Drive, Suite 220, Caribou, ME 04736 | 29 Christopher Toppi Drive, South Portland ME 04106

207-622-5866 | 207-888-2070 fax | www.mainea.org