

Testimony of Ellen Demmons, Regional School Unit #21  
In Support of LD1183

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Ellen Demmons, I am the Food & Nutrition Director at RSU #21 which includes Kennebunk, Kennebunkport and Arundel.

Today, I am submitting testimony in support of LD 1183 "An Act to Establish the School Meal Equipment and Program Improvement Fund".

We are very lucky in our school district with regards to equipment. RSU #21 has six schools. We completed renovations of 2 schools which included new kitchens in the past few years. In addition, we have been updating equipment as the capital equipment budget allows each year. As of today, we have replaced most of the large equipment in five of our schools. Even with all this support we still are in need of updating equipment in one school. This bill would help with completing the process of equipment replacement. Many school nutrition programs in Maine are not lucky enough to have local funding support for kitchen renovations and equipment replacements

School meals are the most reliable and nutritious source of nutrition for many students. Having updated equipment means that we steam our vegetables keeping in most of the nutrients. We are able to make more items from scratch using local food. Using the tilt skillet we make chicken ramen, soups like fish chowder, sloppy joes, chili, etc. We have combi ovens that can "retherm" leftovers and serve them the next day keeping the food quality high and saving food cost and waste. We are able to batch cook which maintains high food quality and maximum nutrition.

It has been amazing to continue serving our students at no cost thanks to the Maine Legislature. It has taken away the stigma. No student sees a minus on their account balance screen and we don't have to keep calling parents about their negative account. We can just keep doing what we do best, feeding our kids.

Your support of this bill will help school nutrition programs continue to improve upon what they do best. Thank you Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and the Committee for your time and commitment to Maine's children. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Ellen Demmons  
Regional School Unit #21