



Maine Education Association

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**Testimony
In Support of
LD 1183 An Act to Establish the School Meal Equipment and Program
Improvement Fund
Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
April 5, 2023**

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

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher preparation programs as well as many retired educators.

I am here to testify on behalf of MEA in support of LD 1183, An Act to Establish the School Meal Equipment and Program Improvement Fund.

Providing universal school meals for all students has been remarkable. We are so grateful that our legislators and Governor have made this a reality in our state and are continuing to provide this going forward. We are proud that Maine is leading the way in this endeavor and hope that more states will follow. We all know how important providing healthy meals to our students is for their learning and for their lives. This goes a long way toward addressing the number of children in our state who face hunger or who are food insecure, an estimated 1 in 4 children.¹

The food service staff in our public schools do an amazing job, despite often working in less than optimal situations and spaces, relying on aging equipment for preparation, and having to transport meals safely and efficiently to other schools in the district.

The fund called for in LD 1183 would go a long way towards helping to improve these conditions, making both preparation and delivery of school meals more efficient, cost-effective, and, most importantly, better ensuring safety. The proposal also would help support the varied nutritional needs for students with medically necessary dietary restrictions.

The MEA urges you to vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1183.

¹<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maine#:~:text=What%20Hunger%20Looks%20Like%20in,of%20them%2039%2C990%20are%20children.&text=face%20hunger.,in%206%20children%20face%20hunger.>