

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 **LD1183, An Act "An Act to Establish the School Meal Equipment and Program Improvement Fund"**. 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. Many schools lack critical kitchen equipment to provide nutritious meals to meet the needs of their students. This bill would establish a fund to support purchases of school kitchen and cafeteria equipment needed to provide nutritious meals to Maine students, as well as funding to support medically necessary dietary restrictions. Let's pay for good nutrition now instead of poor outcomes later.

Sincerely,
Allyson Perron Drag
American Heart Association/ Stroke Association
Government Relations Director, Senior Regional Lead
Allyson.perron@heart.org
857-540-9686