



**Testimony of Anna Korsen, Full Plates Full Potential  
In Support of LD 1693**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Anna Korsen, Advocacy Director with [Full Plates Full Potential](#), a statewide non-profit on a mission to end child hunger in Maine by strengthening and expanding child nutrition programs. We provide technical and financial assistance to schools and community organizations to help feed kids now, while advocating for the systemic changes necessary to ensure that all Maine's kids have consistent access to nutritious meals.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 1693. I want to thank Representative Talbot Ross for her commitment to equity, racial justice and public health in Maine.

Maine has the highest rate of childhood food insecurity in New England, with [1 in 5 children](#) lacking access to basic nutrition on a regular basis. School nutrition programs across our state heroically meet this need every day with school breakfast and lunch. Full Plates Full Potential provides grant funding and technical assistance directly to school nutrition programs to address barriers to food access in schools and to increase participation in school meals. One important step to increasing participation among students is ensuring that the menu is appealing and nutritious. A recent [study](#) found that school meals are the healthiest meals for many kids, especially those experiencing food insecurity. Maine school nutrition professionals are dedicated to providing healthy and delicious food to students across our state, but they need support in order to do so. School nutrition programs are chronically underfunded, under-resourced, and short staffed. They are often contending with inadequate kitchen equipment and lack of access to professional development and culinary skills training.

I would like to turn the committee's attention to Section C of this bill, which seeks to strengthen child nutrition standards in K-12 schools in the event of nutrition standards weakening federally as we saw happen under the Trump administration. This section also asks that Maine establish incentives and a kitchen equipment grant to support good nutrition for children at school. Both would be worthy investments and would take great strides to support school nutrition professionals.

In conversations with school nutrition staff, I've learned that incentives to support professional development and culinary skills training are needed and desired in the field. The Maine Department of Education has a state of the art training kitchen and provides training and workshops, but registration costs and time away from work can hinder nutrition staff from attending. Incentives to provide registration at no cost, pay for travel time and compensation for lost work time and nutrition staff substitutes would support the amazing men and women who feed Maine's kids everyday to continue to hone their skills.

As an organization that engages in grantmaking, and has provided over \$2.5 million to child nutrition programs in every Maine county, we have a unique understanding of what these programs need to



continue feeding kids. We often get requests for funding to replace large and necessary equipment like ovens, refrigerators, freezers, blast chillers, and dishwashers. Unfortunately, due to limited funding and other critical school nutrition needs, we are not able to fund most of these requests. Without these basic pieces of equipment, school nutrition programs simply can't operate. Maine had a state funded school kitchen equipment grant that was dissolved under the previous administration. We urge the committee to re-establish and adequately fund this grant program to meet this urgent need.

Additionally, this bill calls for reasonably scheduled meal times and adequate time for children to eat. The Maine Department of Education is currently conducting a study to determine the feasibility of school lunch periods that allow for a minimum of 30 minutes of seat time. This would mean that once children get through the lunch line they have at least 30 minutes to sit and enjoy their food. This ensures that children have enough time to eat their entire meal, a meal that for too many children is the only one they can count on in. It would alleviate stress and address the social/emotional needs of students. It would also reduce tray waste. Maine currently advises school districts to allocate at least 20 minutes of a student's day for lunch. However, this includes the time it takes to walk to the cafeteria, wait in line, sit down, and eat. [Research](#) shows that a student at the end of the cafeteria line has only 2-3 minutes to eat, creating a stressful and rushed dining experience and resulting in a child that will have trouble participating in class. Not to mention that nutrient rich options like raw vegetables simply require more time to chew.

In closing, we support LD 1693 and urge the committee to vote ought to pass, and to include language and funding to support school nutrition programs and address child hunger in Maine. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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