

March 19, 2015

Senator Brian Langley, Chair
Representative Victoria Kornfield, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Maine State Legislature
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Testimony in Favor of LD 380, Resolve, To Establish a Working Group to Aid with the End of Student Hunger

Dear Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

The Maine Center for Economic Policy (MECEP) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan economic research organization. We advance public policies that help Maine people prosper in a strong, fair, and sustainable economy.

MECEP urges you to enact LD 380 to help students to access free meals that will improve their health, academic performance, and future economic opportunities.

First we would like to thank the members of the Task Force to End Student Hunger in Maine. They spent countless hours and many long days wrestling with the very real problem in our state of too many students not getting enough to eat during the school day. Their work will benefit thousands of students across Maine and we commend them.

School is hard enough without having to suffer the maladies that hunger causes. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 was created to allow high-poverty schools to offer nutritious breakfasts and lunches to all students at no charge, rather than to only a subset of income-eligible students. It removes the stigma and increases the number of students eating school meals. It makes sure students eat healthily and it provides needed nutrition and energy that improves student grades.

The federal government funds these meals and schools save time and money by not having to process student meal applications from each student.

Unfortunately, some Maine schools are reluctant to implement CEP because of concerns about the impact on their state supplemental funding under Maine's essential program and services education funding formula. State supplemental funding gives a monetary boost to schools in areas with chronic poverty. However, the state relies on individual income data collected through the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the student meals program to calculate each district's state supplemental funding. If a school participates in CEP, they no longer accept and process individual student meal applications. Without the individual income data the forms provide, the state, under current law, cannot calculate the supplemental benefit.

As a result, administrative hurdles are stopping kids from eating right. There are several alternative methods for getting the necessary data. One easy fix would be to change the state funding formula to allow schools to use the community eligibility formula to determine state funding allocations. Community eligibility is based on a direct certification using the percentage of students participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This direct certification approach is being used by other states.

This legislation enables a task force of knowledgeable, resourceful people to sort out this paperwork glitch and to determine whether direct certification is a viable method for Maine school funding formula. It is a needed clarification; one that will help make Maine schools hunger-free.

Thank you for your consideration.

Garrett Martin

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Garrett Martin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and "M".

Executive Director