

# Maine School Administrative District 55

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Good morning Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

I am Mary Emerson, School Nutrition Director for SAD 55 – Sacopec Valley School District & SAD 72 – Pequawket Valley Schools District. I am also speaking on behalf of Maine School Nutrition Association and Maine Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics.

SAD 55 – is at 58% Free & Reduced (48% free & 10% reduced) & SAD 72 – is at 48% Free & Reduced (40% free & 8% reduced).

I am here today to testify in support of LD 816 An Act To Promote Academic Achievement through Hunger Relief for Maine Children. This bill would provide the \$.40 funding for lunches for children who have reduced lunch status. Reduced lunch status represents families with household incomes 130-185% of the poverty level. Families with children with reduced lunch status have a very difficult time paying that \$.40/lunch. I have had families with reduced lunch status tell me that they allow the children to get breakfast, but they simply don't have the \$.40 for lunch so the child packs a PB & J Sandwich and leftovers – rather than have our lunches that is designed to provide one third of recommended daily nutritional needs for the student because they simply don't have the \$2/week to spare. Nutrition is part of the foundation for the achievement of academic success.

Reduced lunch status households represent about 25% of my non-paying families with balances over \$20. These are families that are trying their best to make ends meet. They have to make choices on what to pay with their limited funds. School lunch bills don't charge interest or have late payments. The unpaid debt from reduced lunch families is truly the hardest to collect.

When we saw the elimination of the \$.30 for breakfast we did see an increase in reduced students having breakfast. I strongly feel we would see an increase in lunch participation with the elimination of the \$.40 for lunch. I urge you to support LD 1526 to directly benefit students with reduced lunch status.