Thursday, May 23, 2019

Joint Committee on Education
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Rooms 511-B & 473G
Boston MA 02133

RE: SB.267/HB.591, An Act regarding breakfast after the bell

Dear Chairs Lewis and Peish, and Members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this written testimony in support of SB.267/HB.591, An Act regarding breakfast after the bell.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Plan was developed for and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, a 17-member entity comprising state agency, legislative, and industry representatives, established by the Massachusetts Legislature and Governor to develop recommendations, including legislative and regulatory changes, to promote sustainability and equity in the Commonwealth’s food system.

The Plan represents the views of thousands of residents and farms, as well as hundreds of organizations and businesses. It emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to food system policy, where issues of economic development, natural resources, equitable access to resources, and others are all taken into account when considering laws and regulations related to food.

Support for the Breakfast After the Bell program was raised explicitly in one of the Plan’s recommendations:

Support more schools and school districts in implementing programming that serves breakfast in the classroom. Support increased awareness of Massachusetts DESE guidance to school districts that breakfast is counted as “time on learning.”
(http://mafoodsystem.org/plan/goal/rec/action/556/)

This legislation addresses this recommendation precisely, by requiring public schools with a preponderance of low-income students to offer breakfast after the bell. In doing so, this law will be a significant step forward toward the Plan’s goal of reducing hunger by eliminating cost barriers, and toward a more equitable food system overall. Youth who eat breakfast have fewer absences, improved test scores, and better long-term health outcomes, so providing food and an opportunity to eat it at school demonstrates the Commonwealth’s commitment to the success of all children.

The Breakfast After the Bell program exemplifies the Plan’s overall goal, and the Collaborative’s mission, of demonstrating the interconnectedness of the food system, and how thoughtful policies, programs, and investments in one food system sector can strengthen others. Taking better advantage of the federal resources available for this program will not only mean more food for those in need, but will also increase nutritious menu options, improve health outcomes for children in some of our most
vulnerable communities, and will increase purchases of locally sourced foods, helping to sustain the Commonwealth’s economy, farms, and environment.

We appreciate the Committee taking up this issue, and urge you to pass it and to further consider it in the context of Massachusetts’ food system as a whole. The Plan, which provides that context, is available at http://mafoodsystem.org/plan/, and the Collaborative is available to provide additional information and connections to practitioners and advocates who can offer further details, at the pleasure of the Committee.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Winton Pitcoff
Director