



May 3, 2021

Joint Committee on Public Health  
Massachusetts State House  
24 Beacon St.  
Rooms 413-C & 130  
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H.2277 An Act to promote local agriculture and student nutrition

Dear Chairs Comerford and Decker, and members of the Committee:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this written testimony in support of H.2277 An Act to promote local agriculture and student nutrition, and to make suggestions for strengthening this bill to increase food system education in the Commonwealth. 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 includes a recommendation that the state increase food system education among K-12 students in Massachusetts. Food system education includes subjects such as nutrition, agriculture, food justice, and culinary skills. Though many students currently receive some instruction in these areas, the instruction is not consistently available to every student and not as robust as it could be to support desired outcomes such as student long term health, understanding of the food system, and job readiness.

Every school that participates in the National School Meals program must have a Local School Wellness Policy. Some of the required content of the policies include school nutrition, nutrition education and physical activity. This bill would expand the required elements to include school gardens. School gardens are important educational spaces where students can participate in hands-on lessons about biology, nutrition, and natural resources, supporting learning around science, math, reading, and health. School gardens can also help students develop an appreciation for the environment and healthy fruits and vegetables and can resonate with children from various backgrounds. We support this bill's goal.

Wellness Policies could have an even greater impact if they included more specific language about providing broader food system education lessons, increased accountability for how they are implemented, and resources to support adding these elements. We support requirements that Wellness Policies include:

- Nutrition and food system education being taught at every grade level, in accordance with best practices and integrated into core subjects as well as into the health curriculum.

- Teachers being provided with training on nutrition education and agriculture education.
- School gardens being used to support classroom learning.
- Students being given the opportunity to eat the food grown in the garden.
- An implementation plan for the Wellness Policy and evaluating implementation of the plan annually.
- An annual health and wellness assessment of the school environment, including measurements of the impacts of the Wellness Policy.

We urge the committee to consider adding language to this bill that would reflect the inclusion of these important issues in all schools' Wellness Policies.

We appreciate the Committee taking up this issue, and urge you 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Winton Pitcoff', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Winton Pitcoff  
Director