



Thursday, May 20, 2021

Joint Committee on Education
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston MA 02133

RE: S.256/H.585 An Act to Promote Student Nutrition

Dear Chairs Lewis and Peisch:

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative is pleased to offer this testimony in support of S.256/H.585 An Act to Promote Student Nutrition.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, accepted by the state's Food Policy Council in 2015.

The bills, as proposed, address one of the Plan's recommendations for state policy: "Increase and maximize the use of available food assistance programs for children and adolescents." In doing so, this legislation also represents a step toward the Plan's larger goals of reducing hunger and food insecurity, and increasing the availability of healthy food to all Massachusetts residents.

By eliminating reduced-price meals in favor of free meals, passage of this bill would not only ensure that thousands of students are better fed and their households more food secure, but would also save the state money by leveraging available federal resources for those meals. Requiring that more schools participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) would also mean more federal resources would be captured to help ensure that more children from low-income Massachusetts families would have access to the nutrition they need in order to thrive. And eliminating punitive action from being taken against children whose school meal accounts are in arrears would help to ensure consistent access to food for those who are most in need.

We also support Project Bread's recommendation that the bill be amended to include all schools and districts eligible to participate in CEP at the federal minimum. Doing so would not only expand access to school meals for thousands of children, but would leverage additional federal resources, adding those funds to the local economy as school cafeterias create jobs and purchase local goods and services.

We appreciate the Committee taking up these issues. You can find the Plan and see how these issues fit into the context of Massachusetts' food system as a whole at <http://mafoodsystem.org/plan>.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Winton Pitcoff", written over a horizontal line.

Winton Pitcoff, Director