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Maine Public Health Association

Testimony In Support of LD1684

**Act Regarding Eligibility of Children Placed in Guardianship for the
School Lunch and Milk Program**

Senator Millett, Representative MacDonald and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Tina Pettingill and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Public Health Association (MPHA). We are an organization which represents 400 public health professionals across the State committed to creating an environment which sustains and improves the health and well-being of Maine residents. Our diverse membership has a common interest in the promotion and protection of the public's health. On behalf of our board, staff, and members I would like to offer some thoughts for you to consider while making your decision on LD 1684.

The Maine Public Health Association is committed to policy changes that have a positive impact on population health, such as the well-being of Maine's Children and more specifically, food insecurity. There are approximately 10,000 kinship families in Maine who are not involved in the foster care system, and are not receiving any assistance from the state's foster care system. Kinship guardians are required to meet all of the health and safety needs of the child, similar to foster care parents. This type of guardianship is important to support for the wellbeing of Maine Children who cannot remain in the care of their parents. Despite the many similarities between the two types of care providers, the same financial services are not provided to kinship families.

One of the disparities in financial services is that, unlike foster care families, Maine does not offer subsidy for school lunch programs to the children of kinship guardians. **The National School Lunch Program has been previously determined to reduce food insecurity in low income populations (National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey). Numerous studies have linked household food insecurity to poorer nutritional, physical and mental health among adults and children. In addition, research has found that food insecure children are more likely to have behavioral problems and academic difficulties. We believe Maine needs to eliminate this disparity between these two types of guardianships in determining who eligible for free/reduced lunch.**

On behalf of the Board, staff and 400 members of the Maine Public Health Association, I urge you to consider a unanimous Ought to Pass report on LD 1684.

Feel free to contact me with any questions at mainepha@gmail.com or 730.1040. Thank you for your time.

Kristina Pettingill

Kristina Pettingill, MPH
Executive Director