



May 17, 2021

Dear House Chair Alice Peisch, Senate Chair Jason Lewis and honorable members of the Joint Committee on Education:

Groundwork Lawrence (GWL), a MA certified community development nonprofit corporation, has been making change happen in Greater Lawrence since its beginnings in 1999. Through its environmental and open space improvements, healthy food access programs, youth education, employment initiatives, community programming, and events, GWL creates the building blocks of a healthy community and empowers residents to improve their quality of life.

Groundwork has been working on food access issues since building our first community garden in 2006. With over \$600,000 in annual sales through our three farmers markets (primarily through SNAP and HIP), an urban farm, 11 community gardens, a healthy on the block program, and our Grab 'n Go restaurant meal program, we have seen how food insecurity has grown in Greater Lawrence. Looking at the pre-COVID-19 SNAP Gap numbers, approximately 40% of Greater Lawrence residents qualify for SNAP but do not receive benefits. Knowing that food insecurity has increased significantly over the past year, Groundwork writes in support of S.298/ H.715 *An Act to Promote Student Nutrition*. This bill is an important boost to move us forward in alleviating the burden of hunger for our children in Greater Lawrence and across the Commonwealth while balancing the school nutrition program budget. It will promote the adoption of the universal free meal by requiring school districts with high numbers of low-income students to participate in Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and allow families across the Commonwealth to lead healthier lives.

Additionally, for families who live in these districts, school meal debt and the accompanying shame would no longer be a burden. In Lawrence, one in three families is persistently unable to meet their daily food needs. This Federal program will enable low-income districts to serve universal school meals and require that schools within these districts communicate directly with parents and guardians rather than students to address school meal debt and ensure all students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals receive them.

We urge the committee to report out S.298 /H.715 with favorable considerations. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation. If you have any questions or require additional information I can be reached at (978) 974-0770 x7009 or [hmcman@groundworklawrence.org](mailto:hmcman@groundworklawrence.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heather McMann", written in a cursive style.

Heather McMann, Executive Director

CC: Sen. Finegold, Rep. Moran, Rep. Minicucci, Rep. Devers