



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Education
In Support of H.715/S.298 An Act to Promote Student Nutrition
By Palma McLaughlin, LWVMA Specialist on Children and Family Issues
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, which represents 47 local Leagues across the Commonwealth with over 3,000 members asks you to support H.715 and S.298 An Act to Promote Student Nutrition.

Long before the COVID 19 public health crisis exposed the magnitude of educational and economic disparities, Massachusetts was among the first places in the world to make the education of young people a public responsibility. The state has long been a leader in education and educational equity. Equity in education depends on meeting the basic human needs of children and their families, including access to nutritionally-adequate school lunches. As of last year, 22 states and the District of Columbia had passed legislation to promote access to healthy meals for all students, maximize participation in federal reimbursement programs and help make schools stigma-free and healthy for all students and families. It is time for Massachusetts to join them.

These bills would prohibit school districts from denying hot lunches to students who don't have the money to pay for lunch and from taking punitive action against students due to meal debt.

They would require schools to deal directly with parents. They would prevent schools from selling meal debt to third-party debt collectors and from reporting parents to DCF for meal debt.

School lunch is as integral to educational success as books and school buildings. Hungry children do not learn. Shamed and bullied children do not learn, especially when the bully is a school policy that takes a hot lunch away from a child due to meal debt.

Studies show that students thrive when parents are engaged in a partnership with the schools, something made glaringly clear during the pandemic. This does not happen when schools and parents are pitted against each other due to meal debt. These bills encourage schools to work with parents directly and encourage the expanded application for federal reimbursements under the National School Lunch Program.

The League strongly urges you to support the passage and implementation of these two bills and to report these bills favorably and in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration.