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The Honorable Jason Lewis, Senate Chair  
The Honorable Alice Peisch, House Chair  
Joint Committee on Education  
State House, Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Testimony in Support of S.298/H.715, An Act to Promote Student Nutrition**

Dear Chairman Lewis, Chairwoman Peisch, and Members of the Committee:

School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of S.298/H.715, An Act to Promote Student Nutrition and for the committee's past support of child nutrition programs, including passage of An Act Regarding Breakfast After the Bell last session. Your continued support has helped schools across the state provide healthy meals for students of all ages.

The School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts is made up of school nutrition directors, managers, employees and other food service professionals dedicated to child nutrition. As school nutrition professionals, we have a unique opportunity to make a difference in children's lives every day. Over the past year, the necessity of child nutrition programs has been further amplified by the impact of COVID-19. According to Feeding America, one in 5 children are food insecure in the state of Massachusetts, which further illustrates the importance of supporting school nutrition programs.

The School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts would like to bring your attention to several key components of S.298/H.715 in particular, that will specifically help address food insecurity by increasing access to school meals across the state.

**1. Eliminate the reduced-price fee for school meals:**

Reduced price meals typically cost families \$126.00 per student per year. For struggling families, this is a large expense. In some cases, families are unable to pay the \$126.00 which leaves school districts with student meal debt. Eliminating the reduced-price fee would allow more families access to free meals, while also relieving some of the administrative burden of trying to recover losses from student meal debts.

## **2. Require school districts who qualify for CEP to consider participation:**

Every year, school districts who are able to directly certify at least 40% of their students as free or reduced price meals are encouraged to explore the possibility of the Community Eligibility Provision. This provision allows schools with a high number of directly certified students to offer free meals to all. The School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts would like to require that all eligible schools consider participation in the Community Eligibility Provision.

To aid in the decision making process, all food service directors in eligible districts should attend an annual training with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education so that they fully understand how to make the Community Eligibility Provision work.

Not only will this decrease administrative duties related to free and reduced price meal applications, but it will also help to decrease the stigma of the school meal programs. Now is the perfect time to make this happen because we currently have an increase in the number of families who qualify for SNAP benefits and other assistance programs.

## **3. Increase the number of times schools are required to run direct certification reports to ensure that schools are capturing the maximum number of students who qualify for free or reduced price meals**

School nutrition directors are currently required to run direct certification reports three times per year. However, the School Nutrition Association of MA, would like to urge you to increase the frequency of these required reports. The more often that schools run direct certification reports, the more likely they are to increase the number of students who qualify for free or reduced price meals. These numbers change every month as new families apply for SNAP benefits, so running direct certification reports more often will capture more eligible students in a timely manner.

In summary, the School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts would like to thank you for your continued support and encourage you to pass S.298/H.715, An Act to Promote School Nutrition. There is no time like the present to pass S.298/H.715. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified and demonstrated the food insecurity that many struggle with in Massachusetts. Schools have the unique ability to provide students with at least two healthy meals per day, but there are often obstacles to reaching all of the students in need. Passing S.298/H.715 will help schools overcome those obstacles and provide needed resources to reduce food insecurity.