



Testimony in Support of S.267/H.591, An Act Regarding Breakfast After the Bell (Sen. DiDomenico & Rep. Vega)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.267/H.1591, An Act regarding Breakfast After the Bell. My name is Erin McAleer, and I am the President of Project Bread, a statewide anti-hunger organization committed to preventing and ending hunger in Massachusetts by providing access to affordable, healthy food for the 1 in 10 households – and 1 in 9 children – facing food insecurity in our state today. A child who is lacking the most basic of human needs is not in a condition to learn, live and thrive. We have the means to ensure no child goes hungry here in Massachusetts, and we should.

In order to address hunger in our state, Project Bread prioritizes increasing access to the federal nutrition programs which are scalable and federally reimbursed, yet also underutilized. For over 20 years, one of the federal programs we have prioritized is the National School Breakfast Program (SBP). In 1998, Project Bread worked with Boston Public Schools to pilot one of the first universal free school breakfast programs in the country. With researchers from Massachusetts General Hospital, we demonstrated that when students regularly eat school breakfast, they are tardy and absent less often and have higher math test scores.

Since 1995, we have been working district-by-district, school-by-school, to implement breakfast after the bell, and while we are proud of what we have accomplished as an organization and as a state in the past 20 plus years, I stand before you today to unequivocally state that we need this legislation, which would require schools with 60 percent or more students eligible for free or reduced-price meals to serve breakfast after the bell. This would close the gap and ensure that 150,000 kids in 700 high-poverty schools across the Commonwealth begin their day with breakfast. Today I will share with you why this is so critical right now, and also assure you that Project Bread stands ready to support schools in implementation when this legislation becomes law.

Project Bread's Child Nutrition Outreach Program (CNOP), funded by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, provides schools with technical assistance regarding their breakfast programs that includes, but is not limited to, tools to analyze financial viability, trainings for food service staff, expertise in outreach strategies, promotional resources, and regulatory compliance support. We also provide financial support through grants raised philanthropically.

Project Bread has found that school breakfast served after the bell is the most effective strategy for increasing participation. But while ensuring breakfast is provided after the bell is critical, we also know that the models for providing the breakfast can and should be flexible to meet the individual needs of the schools and

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students, meaning, for some classrooms, breakfast is provided in the classroom, whereas for others, it may be provided by a cart parked outside the classroom for kids to “grab and go.”

Let me share an example of a school system we recently supported – Leominster Public Schools. We worked with the district to determine the appropriate breakfast models for their schools, and also provided the district with almost \$13,000 in financial support to purchase necessary equipment, including cold-storage delivery bags and rolling grab & go carts with point of sale systems. This effort will impact more than 3,000 students, over two-thirds of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

Despite these efforts, and a clear understanding of the benefits of serving breakfast after the bell, Massachusetts continues to struggle to reach all eligible students and is ranked 33rd in the nation in participation. In school year 2017-2018, participation among free and reduced-price eligible students only grew by 2.3% over the previous year, and as of October 2018, participation still hovers around 38%. This means that only 38% of kids in Massachusetts who need breakfast are receiving it. We have seen states such as Nevada, New Mexico, and West Virginia demonstrate large increases in participation after passage of legislation similar to this bill. For example, one year after Nevada passed legislation requiring schools with 70% or more free and reduced-price eligible students serve breakfast after the bell, participation among low income students increased by 29.3%, representing an increase of over 26,000 students.

Again, I urge the Committee to favorably report on this legislation and work with us to realize a shared vision in which all Massachusetts students begin each morning with a healthy breakfast. Project Bread will continue to support districts and schools while this legislation is pending and after it is signed into law. I assure you we are prepared to support schools and districts in implementation, working hand-in-hand to provide the most successful school breakfast program possible. With the passage of this legislation, we can move beyond efforts to bring the remaining schools on board, and instead focus on how those schools can best implement a successful program for their students.

Until every child in our state has reliable access to healthy and affordable food, we will never level the playing field and efforts to address other inequities will be in vain.

Thank you.

