

May 9, 2018

Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz  
Representative Alice Peisch  
Co-Chairs, Joint Committee on Education  
The State House  
Boston, MA 02133

Re: An Act to Promote Student Nutrition, S. 2390 and H. 4422

Dear Senator Chang-Diaz, Representative Peisch, and Members of the Committee,

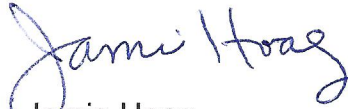
I write today in strong support of S. 2390/H. 4422, An Act to Promote Student Nutrition. We all know that being a young student in our society today is an experience filled with academic and social pressures. Children are pressed to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom. These pressures are only compounded for students from families struggling economically. Here in Massachusetts, we should be doing everything we can to help these young men and women who are the future of our Commonwealth. That is why I encourage you to enact this legislation and put an end to the "meal shaming" practices outlined in the recent report, "Denying Food and Shaming Children: Unpaid School Meal Policies in Massachusetts," prepared by the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. We can and must do better for our students.

As a child in Fall River, I was a recipient of free lunches. My family and I were grateful for the support and the hot meal I received every day. But I remember the stigma I felt when I was given a red ticket to hand to the dining employee, signaling that I was a free lunch recipient. While I certainly was not the only one in my school who carried such a ticket, it distinguished me from many of my peers at a time in my development when I simply wanted to fit in. After reading the report, I quickly and sadly came to the realization that this past (and possibly current) practice in Fall River was gentile compared to practices at some other school districts in the Commonwealth. We all recognize that school budgets are tight, but innocent young students should not be shamed (and food should not be wasted) simply because of their inability to pay for their lunches.

The Act to Promote Student Nutrition gets an A+ for addressing this issue in a thoughtful, fiscally responsible, and humane way. Among other things, the bill requires school districts to communicate with parents about meal debt rather than a confused

child who simply wants to eat with his/her friends without stigma. The bill also requires school districts to maximize existing federal revenue which is appropriated for the purpose of ensuring no child goes hungry. Overall, while this legislation will sadly not erase the social pressures associated with gym class, it will put an end to the awful and embarrassing practices of "meal shaming" that currently occur throughout the Commonwealth. That's a step in the right direction. I respectfully ask that you act quickly and favorably report this bill out of your committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jamie Hoag". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jamie Hoag  
23 Brimmer Street  
Watertown, MA 02472

Cc: Representative Jonathan Hecht  
Senator William Brownsberger