

Monday, May 14, 2018

The Honorable Sonia Chang-Diaz, Senate Chair
The Honorable Alice Peisch, House Chair
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Boston MA 02133

RE: An Act to Promote Student Nutrition, Senate Bill 2390/House Bill 4422

Dear Chairperson Sonia Chang-Diaz and Chairperson Alice Peisch:

We, the members and supporters of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, support Senate Bill 2390 and House Bill 4422, which would codify existing federal guidance which establishes that no school official may delay or deny food to punish students for any reason (within the cafeteria or outside of it). It would also make it illegal for school districts to shame a child or to treat a child differently due to unpaid school meal debt. Finally, it would require districts to take steps to reduce student meal debt by maximizing federal revenue.

In 2014, MAZON and our synagogue partners launched the nation's first successful state legislative effort that exposed and banned "lunch shaming" in Minnesota. In April 2017, MAZON's grantee partner, New Mexico Appleseed passed similar legislation in New Mexico. Last November, MAZON and our partners successfully passed law that made California the largest state yet to make these shaming practices illegal in our schools.

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is one of the most important federal programs to combat child hunger and improve school attendance and outcomes. The NSLP Community Eligibility is a proven way to ensure that all children who need it are not denied a meal and to remove unnecessary paperwork in the administrative procedure. Unfortunately, this provision is not available at all schools nor is it used by all eligible schools. As a result, children who do not qualify for a free or reduced meal through NSLP because they have incomes above 185% of the Federal Poverty Line or whose parents have not applied for the program must pay for a meal at either a reduced price or the full price. It is a common practice in school cafeterias to provide a meal all students who request one, even those who are not enrolled in the NSLP and arrive without money; the debt is later collected from the parent or guardian.

Mass Law Reform Institute, with support from MAZON, recently published a survey of 154 Massachusetts school districts that identified a wide range of issues around lunch debt and "lunch shaming". SB 2390 and HB 4422 would prevent a child from being purposefully shamed for the debt of their parents or denied food as a form of punishment. For these reasons, MAZON supports SB 2390 and HB 4422 and respectfully requests your support.

Sincerely,

Samuel Chu

Samuel Chu
National Organizer
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger