

Testimony of Emma Renaud

March 16, 2022 - s.100

Hi, my name is Emma Renaud. I'm a freshman at Essex High School here to ask the committee to pass S.100, and include both breakfast and lunch at no cost to all Vermont students, starting with the 2022-23 school year, and paid for from the education fund.

Watching fellow classmates in the lunchroom this year has been a completely different experience than past years. The lines for school meals are always full, sometimes even out the doors. Tables are full of nutritious food and everyone has a plate.

For me, having school lunches free means stress free mornings, not having to worry about packing food, confidence walking in the cafeteria, and nutrition giving me energy to get through difficult classes. But, I'm not the only one that feels this way. Essex High School Freshman Jaila Palermo reported the following: "Not everyone can afford school meals, and if you forget money then you can't have food. Some students' home situations don't allow for the money and resources needed to provide sufficient nutrition, so it is important that school is a safe and reliable place to get that."

Before free meals, the familiar school lunch stigma had students feeling shy and judged about getting hot lunch. It dictated whether or not I fueled my body for the day and forgetting lunch money was embarrassing. But for many, embarrassment wasn't the biggest issue. Instead, it was the fear and reality of being hungry all day. Without food we have no energy to learn and think, so our best work isn't possible.

Another student, Ellie Laroche, gives us her opinion on why it's important to keep meals without charge: "It makes nutrition accessible to everyone. You don't have the stress of packing food or buying hot lunches."

Although the anxiety of getting school food is a big part of why we want free meals, the equality piece of this situation is also incredibly important. As you all know, not every student has the resources for buying food. It isn't equitable for us to give certain families under a certain category financial aid, but not others that need help too. Not every family that isn't able to provide their children nutritious meals are a part of that category.

And so, again I ask the committee to pass S.100, and include both breakfast and lunch at no cost to all Vermont students, starting with the 2022-23 school year, and paid for from the education fund. Thank you for your time.