

Dear Senate Education Committee -

Our names are Emma Renaud and Grace Symula, and we are 9th grade students at Essex High School.

Over the past year, as part of the issues committee in the Student Government club at Essex High, we have been organizing and advocating for S.100, the Universal School Meals bill. In Student Government, we hear the wants and needs of the student body and take action to make our school community the best it can be. As part of our organizing efforts, we did a survey of students throughout the school, and there was huge support for Universal School Meals. Some of what we heard from other students is:

Ellie Laroche: "USM will make nutrition accessible to everyone. You don't have the stress of packing food or buying hot lunches."

Jaila Palermo: "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."

Ada Jorschick: "I think it's important because some people might not be able to pay the expenses. It should be free to help students who need nutrition and can't afford it."

Avery Casavant: "Not everyone has the opportunity to pay for lunch and it's more helpful to people who need it."

After the survey, we were able to testify on S.100 in the House Education Committee. In our testimony, we shared why Universal School Meals are important to us. Some of what we shared was that before free meals, the familiar school lunch stigma had students feeling shy and judged about getting hot lunch. It dictated whether or not we fueled our bodies 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. As students ourselves, we see the effects of what this bill would do and how it will help students; that is why it is so important for us. Free meals are needed in school for all students to feel comfortable, and with S.100 that would be the reality.

If you'd like to watch our full testimony, you can watch it [here](#).

Thank you for your time - please vote to support S.100, and ensure all students can continue to have access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch everyday, without having to worry.

Thank you -

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Essex High School