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Testimony of Senator Eloise Vitelli supporting
**LD 921, An Act to Allow the Local Foods Fund for Public Schools to Be Used
for Processed and Value-added Maine Food Products**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
March 22, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Eloise Vitelli, and I proudly represent Senate District 24, which includes all of Sagadahoc County and Dresden. Today I am pleased to offer testimony in support of LD 921, “An Act to Allow the Local Foods Fund for Public Schools to Be Used for Processed and Value-added Maine Food Products.”

Some Members of this Committee might remember that I have long been a supporter of making local Maine foods available in Maine schools. In the 129th Legislature, I introduced [LD 454](#), “An Act To Encourage the Purchase of Local Produce for Public Schools,” which funded the Local Produce Fund for the first time. For those who are not familiar, the Local Produce Fund incentivizes schools to purchase produce and other minimally-processed foods from local farmers and producers by matching one dollar for every three dollars a school administrative unit spends on qualifying local foods.

Following LD 454, in the 130th Legislature I was proud to sponsor [LD 636](#), “An Act To Encourage the Purchase of Local Foods for Public Schools,” which broadened the eligibility criteria for the Local Produce Fund to further benefit Maine farmers, schools, and students. The bill, now law, added value-added dairy and protein sources such as yogurt, fish, eggs, meat, and tofu to the Local Produce Fund. The law also changed the name of the program to the Local Foods Fund so that we could support Maine farmers and all their products – the fruits and vegetables, but also dairy, fish, and meat products.

Now that I’ve shared some of the legislative history on this program, I will direct your attention to LD 921, “An Act to Allow the Local Foods Fund for Public Schools to Be Used for Processed and Value-added Maine Food Products,” which would remove “minimally processed” from the eligibility criteria for foods purchased using the Local Foods Fund. It would also direct the Department of Education to set standards for allowable processed and value-added Maine foods. I support this proposed improvement to the Local Foods Fund. It’s important that we support our local farmers and food producers. It’s also important that we encourage high participation in the program. If a school has less kitchen equipment or a small cafeteria staff, why should they be

excluded from the program? That's a disservice to the school, the students, and the farmers and food producers in the area. By making more foods eligible for reimbursement, including Maine processed foods, we can help schools with a wide range of food processing capacity participate. I would urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 921.

Thank you for your time, I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eloise".

Eloise Vitelli

Senate Majority Leader, Senate District 24
Sagadahoc County and Dresden