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For Immediate Release

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House and Senate agree to bill expanding student access to school breakfast in Massachusetts

BOSTON –The House and Senate have approved legislation providing expanded school breakfast options to Massachusetts students in low-income communities.

State Representative Hannah Kane, R-Shrewsbury, said House Bill 4218, *An Act regarding breakfast after the bell*, will help students be better prepared for learning by providing them with a nutritious breakfast at school. The bill was enacted in both legislative branches on July 28, and is now on Governor Charlie Baker’s desk awaiting his signature.

According to the Ending Hunger in Our Classrooms 2019 Annual Report, Massachusetts ranks 33rd out of 50 states in the percentage of low-income children who eat a school breakfast every day. The report estimates that nearly 159,000 low-income students in the Commonwealth do not have access to a nutritious morning meal at school each day.

To address this problem, House Bill 4218 requires public schools to provide a school breakfast after the beginning of the instructional day if at least 60% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the federal National School Lunch Program. The bill gives schools the flexibility to choose which breakfast service model best suits its students, including breakfast in the classroom, grab and go breakfast served from mobile carts or kiosks located in the school, or a second chance breakfast offered during breaks between classes. H4218 was a Food System Caucus priority bill, and as a founding member and Co-Chair of the Food System Caucus, Representative Kane is especially glad to see it passed by the Legislature, noting that it will make an even bigger impact on Commonwealth students during this time of heightened food insecurity.

House Bill 4218 directs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to develop guidelines and regulations to assist schools with implementing breakfast after the bell. DESE must also conduct an initial assessment of all schools required to offer breakfast after the bell by December 31, 2021, with the goal of implementing the program at the start of the 2022-2023 academic year.

A school can obtain a one-year waiver from the breakfast after the bell requirement if it already has a breakfast participation rate of 80% or higher, or if the school demonstrates an extreme hardship related to implementation.

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