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## **Press Release - Muskie Urges President to Reverse Department of Agriculture Regulations on School Lunch**

Edmund S. Muskie

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## MUSKIE

Maine

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FOR RELEASE

Monday, October 18, 1971

A.M.'s

### MUSKIE URGES PRESIDENT TO REVERSE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE REGULATIONS ON SCHOOL LUNCH

Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) has urged President Nixon to reverse proposed regulations by the U.S. Department of Agriculture which could mean that an estimated 10,000 Maine school children would no longer be eligible for free or reduced-rate lunches by the end of this year.

In a bi-partisan letter to the President, signed by 58 of his Senate colleagues, Senator Muskie said, "The Department of Agriculture, by arbitrarily limiting the eligibility of children for the School Lunch Program is violating both the spirit and letter of the National School Lunch Act."

The National School Lunch Act allows states and localities to determine eligibility standards based on guidelines suggested by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In Maine, close to 40,000 school children are enrolled in the program, according to the Maine Department of Education. Under existing federal guidelines, Maine officials allow children free lunches if the annual income for a family of four is \$3,720 or less. If the annual income for a family of four is \$3,721 - \$4,530, the school children are allowed a reduced-rate lunch in Maine.

Earlier this month, the Administration announced that it was revising its suggested guidelines for implementing the school lunch program in the states downward to exclude any assistance to children from families having incomes above the federal poverty level -- an income of \$3,940 for a family of four.

"The consequence of this action," Senator Muskie said, "will be to cut out an estimated 10,000 school children in Maine who are now enrolled in the lunch program."

Across the nation, as many as 1.5 million school children may be affected by this action.

"Certainly, there must be other ways to save money in our national budget than to take food away from hungry children," the Senator said.

The Senator further stated, "The intent of Congress in providing a minimum eligibility standard was to ensure that all children under this level shall receive free or reduced-rate lunches, but that children from families above this minimum, as determined by the state and locality in which they reside, should be covered by the program as well."

"The school lunch program has benefitted thousands of Maine children. This action by the Department of Agriculture is not only ill-timed but is unwarranted."

"I have urged President Nixon to take immediate steps to prevent the revised regulations to become effective in order to help fulfill our Congressional pledge in passing the School Lunch Act to end hunger in America's schoolrooms."