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United Way
of Southern Maine



Hello Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

My name is Taylor Cray, and I am writing to you today in support of LD568: An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives. I currently work as a Team Leader with Preble Street Advocacy, a role that includes working with the Maine Hunger Initiative. The Maine Hunger Initiative works to ensure that folks in Southern Maine, and across the State of Maine, have access to nourishing food that is culturally appropriate and available when they need it.

Within the Maine Hunger Initiative, we have recently launched a group called the Food Justice Coalition, which is a group of individuals with lived experience who discuss the work being done by Preble Street Food Programs, along with larger issues that impact folks across the state. Much of our early conversation has centered around the end of SNAP EA benefits, and the ways that families and individuals can supplement their lowered SNAP benefits. Programs like Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards critically assist individuals and families with the purchase of fresh and local produce, and empower households by offering more freedom in food choice. While this may seem like a small thing, the element of choice often becomes a rare luxury for folks struggling with poverty and food insecurity. With the end of SNAP EA benefits, fresh fruits and vegetables may be the first things to be removed from a family's diet due to limited income. These items are often more costly, and more perishable, than shelf-stable alternatives that may be less nourishing.

The ability to access healthy and nourishing food is a necessity for the health and well-being of all individuals, regardless of their income level. Nutritional incentive programs like Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards help to bridge the gaps that exist in food access for those folks who are unsure whether they will be able to stretch their food budgets to include a trip to the farmer's market or who are choosing between nourishment and quantity of meals. Funding these programs helps to ensure that healthy food is available to everyone living in Maine, not only to those who have the financial resources to access it.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your work to continue ensuring the health and wellness of all Mainers. Please vote in support of LD568.

Sincerely,

Taylor Cray

Team Leader, Homeless Voices for Justice

Preble Street

