



February 1, 2024

Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine testimony to the Committee on Health and Human Services in support of LD 1877, An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty by Adjusting Assistance for Low-Income Families

To Chairperson Meyer, Chairperson Baldacci, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

My name is Amy Regan Gallant and I am the Vice President of Public Policy for Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. I am here today to support, and ask for your support, of LD 1877, An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty by Adjusting Assistance for Low-Income Families.

The mission of Good Shepherd Food Bank is to eliminate hunger in Maine by improving access to nutritious food for people in need, building strong community partnerships, and mobilizing the public in the fight to end hunger. Good Shepherd Food Bank works in partnership with nearly 600 organizations to help distribute food to community members in need. Our network of partner agencies includes food pantries, meal sites, senior centers, school programs, and healthcare facilities. In our work centering equity, we are increasingly working with communities of color to address food security in a culturally responsive way.

According to the recently released USDA Household Food Insecurity in the U.S. Report, Maine has the highest rates of hunger in New England with approximately 10% of Maine households experiencing food insecurity last year. **42% of Maine households headed by single parents are food insecure. One in 8 Maine children, or 36,490 children, faced hunger in Maine in 2021.** The food bank and food pantries are hearing that more Mainers across the state are having trouble meeting their basic needs due to rising costs, reduction in SNAP benefits, and other economic factors that impact household budgets. A sampling of data from 40 food pantries in Maine indicate that food pantry visits have increased by more than 35% between 2022 and 2023, and an estimated 15% more households are accessing pantries that have never had to access a pantry previously. While need can vary greatly from one community to the next, our sampling of data and the anecdotes we hear indicate that need is growing during these challenging economic times.

TANF is a critical piece of the puzzle when it comes to making sure families and children have food security. The charitable food network, while they do a tremendous amount of work filling the gaps as much as possible, cannot and will never support the financial security of Maine families in the way that benefit programs including SNAP and TANF do. While we understand there may be more details to work out in what might be in a final version of this bill, what we want to share with you today is how impactful a meaningful TANF benefit increase would be for the families we serve. You have the opportunity to provide immediate and meaningful support for families, pantries, and businesses in Maine. TANF recipients will spend their benefit funds in local businesses. Other increases in benefit programs including the Child Tax Credit and SNAP

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have measurably reduced food and financial insecurity in Maine and across the country. Please take this opportunity to increase the TANF benefit amount for Maine families and children.

We believe there is a solution to the problem of hunger in Maine. We cannot go it alone. Working in partnership with the state legislature we can and will help reduce the impact of hunger in our state and make Maine a stronger, better place to work and live.

Sincerely,

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