

Testimony in Support of LD 415: An Act to Support Hunger Prevention in Maine

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and other members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

My name is Muhidin Libah and I am the Executive Director of the Somali Bantu Community Association (SBCA). SBCA would like to express our support for LD 415 - An Act to Support Hunger Prevention in Maine. SBCA believes that funding this work is essential for investing in our local farmers and ensuring food access for all people in Maine.

SBCA provides vital transitional services, advocacy, and access to land and resources for food production that empowers members of the refugee community to uphold cultural identity and economic well-being to thrive in their life here in Maine. One of our major programs is Liberation Farms, a community farming program that gives over 200 refugee farmers access to, and culturally appropriate resources for, the means of sustainable food production for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Liberation Farms actively addresses issues of hunger and food accessibility in Cumberland and Androscoggin counties through participation in Good Shepherd Food Bank's Mainers Feeding Mainers program. In 2024, Liberation Farms distributed \$47,000 worth of food through this program to large organizations such as the Maine Health Food Pantry in Portland and the Locker Project in South Portland, as well as smaller, rural organizations like the Gray Community Food Pantry. In addition to providing fresh, local produce to food insecure communities, the Mainers Feeding Mainers program connects us to reliable markets and pays fair wages, increasing economic support and livelihood development for immigrant and refugee farmers.

As federal funding for food benefits like SNAP are threatened and programs that support access to local food like the LFPA program are frozen, Mainers Feeding Mainers is more critical than ever. LD 415 would support farmers, improving the viability of farms and programs like ours and it would support Maine communities, increasing access to healthy food for all Mainers. Please support LD 415.