

Testimony in Support of LD 468: An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food

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

The Somali Bantu Community Association (SBCA) would like to express our support for LD 468 - An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food. SBCA believes that funding nutrition incentives is essential in order to support our local farmers and food access for our community.

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.

LD 468 supports Liberation Farms in our food justice in action model. Liberation Farms addresses issues of hunger and accessibility in our region, subsidizing produce prices to high-needs schools and institutions. This provides supplemental income and food to our farmers, nearly all of whom qualify for SNAP. We engage in “farm to low-income consumer” markets by selling at farmers markets that accept SNAP, WIC, and Maine Harvest Bucks. We also accept Maine Harvest Bucks at our Suuq / Farm Stand located at our farm in Wales. We continue to build relationships and pathways to distribute our food in ways that advance food justice in our state and community and nutrition incentives are an important part of our model. We love being able to accept SNAP benefits and offering Maine Harvest Bucks to incentivize people using SNAP to shop local. An investment in these nutrition incentives would allow us to continue to participate in these vital programs and match SNAP dollars.

The Somali Bantu Community Association also serves the particular needs of approximately 4,000 Somali Bantu refugees in downtown Lewiston, Maine. Nutrition incentives like Maine Harvest Bucks, support people in our community, many of whom access SNAP benefits. Nutrition incentives allow our community to further their SNAP dollars, and prioritize healthy, local food that our own community grows. Please support LD 468.