

Joshua Lohnes
Morgantown, West Virginia
LD 124

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Joshua Lohnes, I am a geography professor at West Virginia University where I have engaged in food, nutrition and hunger research for the past 15 years. I am testifying today in support of LD 124, “An Act to Protect the Right to Food” presented by Senator Craig Hickman of Kennebec. I represent community food security advocates across the Mountain State and members of a budding National Right to Food Community of Practice.

Since Mainers voted to pass a constitutional amendment for the Right to Food in 2021, a national movement has taken root as dozens of states, counties and cities across the country organize to replicate the work of codifying this most fundamental human right into law. We are observing and learning from the legislative work happening in your chamber because we are hopeful that it can provide a blueprint for a new kind of food future in this country, a future that you have the privilege of shaping today.

One of the most important aspects of the Right to Food is that it democratizes our food system by giving people meaningful avenues to participate in the decisions that shape their everyday food environments. Such participation forges new social and economic relationships built around reciprocity and trust, nourishment and care. Community driven public food initiatives also build local wealth and mitigate the power of extractive food monopolies who only offer people choices when those are profitable to their shareholders.

The bill before you today adds an important piece of scaffolding to the foundation that was laid when your people voted for their right to choose their food futures. The food system is extremely complex and untangling its various strands to fully realize the Right to Food in Maine, as elsewhere, will surely be a long and arduous process. LD 124 is a meaningful step on that journey. This text protects, respects and fulfills the Right to Food by allowing people and communities across your state to participate in the production of public food spaces, spurring engagement in a generative and necessary democratic debate that should be at the heart of all food system design.

I encourage you to vote 'ought to pass' to give your colleagues the opportunity to engage in this debate as well, by advancing LD 124 to the House and Senate for a vote.

Thank you.