



April 4, 2025

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Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Julie Orrego, and I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. Preble Street operates 16 programs throughout Maine, and its staff works daily alongside hundreds of individuals and families who struggle with housing insecurity. The mission of Preble Street is to provide accessible barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and to advocate for solutions to these problems.

Preble Street supports LD 1017, An Act to Include Food Provided or Served at Emergency Shelters in General Assistance Reimbursement. It seeks to include the cost of food provided or served at emergency shelters as part of the direct costs eligible for reimbursement under General Assistance. If passed, starting January 1, 2026, the Department of Health and Human Services will reimburse municipalities and Indian tribes for 70% of the additional costs related to food provided in emergency shelters.

This bill acknowledges the growing demand for emergency shelters and the crucial role food plays in providing comprehensive support to individuals in crisis. As shelter needs increase, it is crucial to ensure that emergency shelters have the necessary resources to provide safe shelter and nutritious meals. This bill ensures that food costs, which are an integral part of shelter operations, are eligible for reimbursement, helping to sustain emergency shelter programs.

Guests at the Homeless Services Center in Portland report feeling both physically and emotionally nourished by the meals they eat there. For instance, when the shelter served Shepherd's pie, every client in line shared a personal story—about their family, how they made the dish, and whether it was prepared differently or similarly. Those moments lifted everyone's spirits, and rare smiles were seen all around. One client summed it up perfectly: "It tastes like home." If municipalities and tribes were reimbursed for the cost of food served at emergency shelters, more shelters would be able to offer meals to their guests, and more guests would have opportunities for connection and healing.

According to the 2025 Shelter Cost Study released by MaineHousing, 27 shelters were surveyed, and only 11 shelters reported that they budgeted for meals, indicating that many shelters are missing these critical resources.

Local shelters, municipalities, and tribes often bear the financial burden of providing emergency shelter services, which include food. By reimbursing these costs, LD 1017 alleviates some of the financial strain placed on

municipalities and tribes, allowing them to focus on improving shelter conditions, providing additional services, and meeting other community needs.

Thank you for your consideration.

