

**Testimony in Opposition to LD 938, “An Act to Implement Certain Local Spending and Sourcing Requirements Regarding the Statewide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.”**

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James Myall, Policy Analyst

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is James Myall and I am a Policy Analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I’m here to testify against LD 938, “An Act to Implement Certain Local Spending and Sourcing Requirements Regarding the Statewide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.” MECEP believes that LD 938 would impose additional and ultimately unnecessary administrative burdens on the state, on local businesses, and on vulnerable Mainers who need help buying food.

MECEP appreciates the value of supporting local businesses and Maine farmers. However, we believe this bill takes the wrong approach in attempting to do so. Instead of adding restrictions that make the SNAP program harder to use, we believe lawmakers should focus on incentivizing and facilitating the use of SNAP benefits for these local foods. Maine’s existing Harvest Bucks program is a good example of this approach.

LD 938’s provisions would be administratively difficult to implement. To our knowledge, the state has no way of easily measuring the distance between a SNAP recipient’s home and where they spend their benefits. Similarly, the Department would have to develop a whole new infrastructure to assess the origin of food stocked by retailers to determine whether they reach the 10% threshold.

Even if these obstacles were overcome, the bill’s provisions would make life harder for vulnerable Mainers. SNAP recipients already need to be aware of what can and cannot be purchased through the program, which makes grocery shopping unnecessarily difficult. Adding these provisions would mean that SNAP recipients have track where they are spending their benefits to ensure that 10% of the spending is “local” as defined by the bill. While the 50-mile radius is relatively generous, we know that in parts of rural Maine, the distance to a supermarket can be substantial, and many Mainers commute long distances to work that might take them outside the “local” spending zone.

For retailers, we are concerned that the 10% provision could present an additional barrier to participation in the SNAP program, and as a result, SNAP beneficiaries could find

themselves with fewer places to spend their benefits. It seems likely that smaller businesses would find complying with the local sourcing rule more difficult than larger supercenters, potentially leading to a smaller amount of the SNAP benefits going to local businesses.

In general, we believe LD 938 takes a coercive approach to a problem that would be better served by incentivizing and subsidizing the purchase of food locally. As a result it would create administrative burdens that would be expensive to implement and result in less access to food for Mainers with low incomes.

We urge you to vote “ought not to pass.” Thank you and I’m happy to answer any questions at [jmyall@mecep.org](mailto:jmyall@mecep.org)