

Testimony in Support of LD 2040 “An Act to Survey Food Insecurity in Maine”

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Dear Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is James Myall and I’m a policy analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I’m testifying today in support of LD 2040, “An Act to Survey Food Insecurity in Maine” because MECEP knows that having access to reliable data is fundamental to creating good public policy. LD 2040 will help to fill a damaging gap in our understanding of hunger and nutrition in Maine opened up by recent federal actions.

In September, the US Department of Agriculture announced that it would stop collecting annual data on food security. For 30 years, this food security data has given researchers like me and lawmakers like you essential insights into who has trouble putting food on the table in Maine, and why. There is currently no replacement for the federal Household Food Security report, which surveys 50,000 households each year up to 18 questions using rigorous statistical methods. LD 2040 offers us a chance to address that here in Maine by launching our own state-level survey so that we all have the information we need to reduce hunger in Maine.

The need to create a state-level measure of food insecurity is particularly urgent with the changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program made recently at the federal level in HR 1. Maine Department of Health and Human Services estimates that up to 35,000 Mainers will be impacted by the stricter work-reporting requirements in the new legislation, and it will be important to track not only how many people lose access to food assistance, but what impact this has on their ability to feed themselves and their families.

At the same time, Maine has been working towards a vision of “Ending Hunger by 2030.” It will be all-but-impossible to know if this roadmap is successful, and which interventions are working, without a reliable source of data that actually measures food insecurity in Maine.

It is thanks to current food security survey data that we know which Mainers are most likely to experience food insecurity – Mainers of Color, single parents, Mainers with disabilities, and those doing crucial but underpaid work, like home health aides.¹ An investment in ongoing accurate data collection through a program such as the one outlined in LD 2040 is also an investment in those communities.

I'm hopeful that by leading the way in creating a state-level data collection system on food security, Maine can not only replace the outgoing federal dataset, but also build on it. Creating our own report will allow us to bring in new measures and datapoints, improve things like accuracy and timeliness, and to focus on outcomes that are most of interest to Mainers.

I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2040 to ensure that Maine has the reliable data it needs to continue protecting some of our most vulnerable residents and fulfilling our promise to end hunger by 2030.

Thank you; I'll be happy to take any questions.

¹ For examples see, *Everyone at the Table: Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030*, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. nd. <https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/2023-06/maines-roadmap-to-end-hunger.pdf> and James Myall, "Issue Brief: Food Insecurity in Maine," *Maine Center for Economic Policy*. Dec 23, 2019. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/MECEP-Hunger-Issue-Brief-2019.pdf>