



**Testimony of Kristen Kinchla, Maine Children's Alliance
In Support of LD 2040, A Pilot Program to Assess Food Insecurity in Maine**

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

My name is Kristen Kinchla—I go by Kinch—and I am the Research Associate at the Maine Children's Alliance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of LD 2040. I also want to thank Representative Pluecker for his leadership and commitment to Maine's goal of ending hunger.

As a research and data professional, I rely on food insecurity data weekly—often daily—to understand needs, guide advocacy, and support evidence-based policymaking. That is why I am deeply concerned by the cancellation of the USDA Food Insecurity Survey. Without a reliable, nationally consistent data source, Maine will lose its ability to track trends in hunger over time, identify disparities, and ensure that limited public and private resources are reaching the communities that need them most.

LD 2040 is a timely and necessary response to this loss. It represents an opportunity for Maine to step up, fill a critical data gap, and build a more detailed, state-specific understanding of food insecurity—one that reflects geographic differences, income disparities, and the lived experiences of Maine families. Good data are not academic; it is foundational to smart policy.

What we know already should give us pause. Maine currently has the 10th-highest rate of childhood food insecurity nationally and the highest in New England by a significant margin, with county-level rates ranging from 3.6% to 6.8%. More than one in five children—20.6%, or approximately 50,610 Maine kids—experienced food insecurity in 2023. These estimates come from Feeding America's *Map the Meal Gap*, which itself relies on the USDA Food Insecurity Survey that is now at risk.

That same data tells us something especially troubling: 64% of food-insecure children in Maine are *not* eligible for federal nutrition programs like SNAP. And for the 36% who are eligible, looming federal cuts threaten to make matters worse. An estimated 101,000 Maine households are expected to lose some or all of their SNAP benefits by 2034, increasing pressure on families, food systems, and charitable food providers across the state.

At a time when federal supports are shrinking and uncertainty is growing, Maine cannot afford to fly blind. We need robust, state-level data to understand where hunger is increasing, which populations are most affected, and which interventions are actually working.

LD 2040 ensures that Maine children and families are not made invisible by the loss of federal data. It positions our state as an innovative national leader—one willing to invest in the information needed to build effective solutions and move us closer to a future where no one in Maine goes hungry.

Thank you for your time, your thoughtful consideration of this bill, and your continued commitment to the well-being of Maine's children and families. I urge you to support LD 2040.

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Food Security

Food security supports children's growth, learning, development, and emotional well-being

What is Food Insecurity?

Feeding America defines food insecurity as **"a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life."** Food insecurity encompasses more than just the feeling of hunger; it reflects the economic, social, and psychological factors contributing to and resulting from "limited or uncertain access to adequate food."

What Causes Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity is most often the result of everyday challenges faced by families living on low incomes. These challenges include **low wages** and **high costs** for food, housing, medical care, and transportation.

How Children Are Affected

Hunger and the persistent lack of adequate nutrition negatively affect **learning capacity, school attendance, academic performance, behavior, and physical and mental health.** These impacts can have lifelong consequences for health and well-being.

Impact on Families

Food insecurity means making tough choices between buying groceries, paying bills and rent, buying gas, and covering medical expenses. These **stressors can affect a caregiver's physical and emotional well-being**, further perpetuating the cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

Over 1 in 5, (20.6% or 50,610) Maine children are food insecure.

Percent of children ages 0-17 experiencing food insecurity (2023)

