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Good afternoon, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee.

My name is Annika Moore, and I am the Advocacy Team Leader at Preble Street. Preble Street's mission 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.

Every day at Preble Street, we see firsthand the consequences of food insecurity in Maine. We see it among people sleeping outside or in shelters, families struggling to feed their children, Veterans who served our country, and people living with disabilities. Hunger is not a standalone crisis; it is a compounding force that deepens housing instability, worsens physical and mental health, undermines employment, and blocks access to the basic resources people need to survive and regain stability.

One week ago, the US Department of Agriculture published its last Household Food Security Report, which showed an increase in Maine's levels of food insecurity. Despite the concerning picture it painted, this annual survey has been discontinued. The loss of this valuable data going forward poses a major threat to Maine's ability to address hunger, as policymakers and program administrators will no longer have an annual benchmark for evaluating progress.

While organizations publish annual totals, such as how many people access food pantries, we do not track trends, such as which towns or counties are facing the highest demand, or when during the year Mainers tend to rely more heavily on emergency food resources. This limits our ability to respond proactively. Ending this report also makes it harder to clearly document the impact of rising food and housing costs and recent cuts to nutrition assistance on food insecurity levels.

LD 2040 addresses the critical gap in data collection by establishing an annual statewide food insecurity survey, which would provide Maine with reliable, disaggregated data showing who is experiencing food insecurity, where it occurs, and how needs are changing over time. That information is essential for designing effective policies, directing limited resources where they are most needed, and evaluating whether current strategies are working.

Food insecurity is not inevitable. It is a solvable problem when compassion is paired with data. LD 2040 is a wise, forward-looking investment in Maine's ability to understand and address hunger in a meaningful way. As food costs, housing costs, and economic uncertainty continue to rise, the need for timely, statewide data has never been more urgent.

On behalf of Preble Street and the thousands of Mainers we serve each year, we urge you to support LD 2040. Thank you for your time and consideration.

