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Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee. I am Representative Bill Pluecker, representing the communities of Warren, Union, and Hope in House District 44, and I present LD 2051 to clarify eligibility for Maine's state-funded food assistance program.

For nearly thirty years, Maine has provided state-funded SNAP to lawfully present immigrants who may have been excluded from federal benefits. This program reflects our values and pragmatic recognition that hunger harms all Mainers. Recent federal changes under H.R.1 threaten to leave refugees, domestic violence survivors, and trafficking victims without food assistance despite their legal presence and humanitarian protections.

LD 2051 clarifies the definition of "noncitizen legally admitted to the United States" to ensure these vulnerable populations remain eligible for state benefits as originally intended. I do not intend an expansion of current benefits with this bill. It is intended to be a technical correction to preserve existing coverage for people who should already qualify under Maine law.

The individuals affected have been heavily vetted by our federal government. They include refugees who waited years for resettlement approval, survivors fleeing violence under VAWA protections, and human trafficking survivors. Many are elderly, disabled, or awaiting work authorization through no fault of their own.

I want to clarify that we've learned the Department interpreted part of this language as program expansion, which was not our intent. This bill aims to preserve eligibility for current recipients and those previously federally eligible before H.R.1's passage. I'm committed to working with DHHS on any necessary language refinement.

It is important that the Maine legislature reaffirm our commitment to ending hunger. SNAP helps families put down roots, find employment, and contribute to Maine's communities.. Everyone deserves to eat.

I urge your support for LD 2051. Thank you.