



Testimony of Kristen Kinchla, Maine Children's Alliance

In Support of LD 2051, An Act to Ensure Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

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 2051. I also want to thank Representative Pluecker for his leadership and commitment to Maine's goal of ending hunger.

This bill makes a small, technical update to Maine law to make sure that some immigrants who are legally living here, but will lose federal SNAP benefits because of recent federal changes, can still receive Maine's state-funded food assistance—just as the Legislature intended when the program was created 30 years ago.

The context for this bill is Maine's growing child hunger crisis.

Maine currently has the 10th-highest rate of childhood food insecurity in the nation and the highest rate in New England by a significant margin. In 2023, more than one in five children—20.6%, or roughly 50,610 Maine kids—experienced food insecurity.

Federal changes are expected to reduce or eliminate benefits for an estimated 101,000 Maine households by 2034, placing additional strain on families, schools, healthcare systems, and local food providers.

LD 2051 does not expand Maine's program or create new types of benefits. It simply updates the law so that families who are legally living in the U.S. and meet existing hardship requirements—including refugees and survivors of domestic violence or trafficking—are not wrongly denied these benefits because of outdated legal wording.

For children, consistent access to food is not optional—it is foundational to healthy development, school success, and long-term economic stability. When families lose food

assistance during periods of unemployment, recovery from trauma, or while waiting for work authorization, children bear the consequences first and most severely.

This bill makes it easier for the state to run the program as intended, protects children from preventable harm, and helps stabilize families during vulnerable periods.

At a time when food insecurity is rising, and federal support is becoming less reliable, LD 2051 represents a practical step Maine can take to protect children and uphold the purpose of its own laws. This aligns with our hopes for Maine children: a solid foundation for healthy development that supports their long-term success in life.

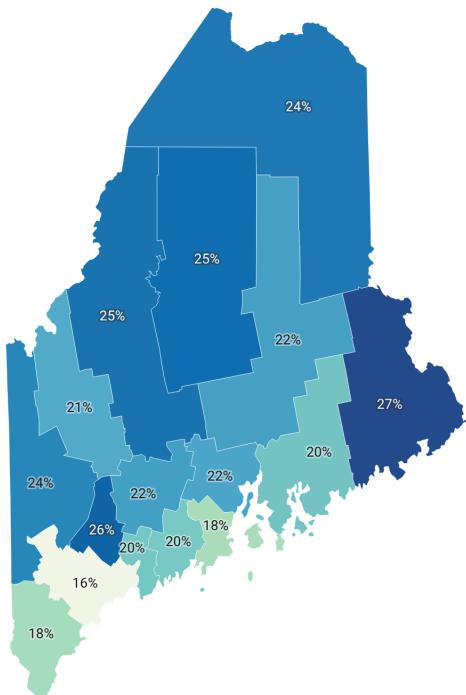
I respectfully urge you to support LD 2051.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any follow-up questions about the data, please email me.

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Childhood Food Insecurity Rates

More than 1 in 5 (20.6%), or 50,610 Maine children, experienced food insecurity in 2023. Of those, 64% were income eligible (incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level) for federal nutrition programs and 36% were likely ineligible for federal nutrition programs (incomes above 185% of the poverty level).

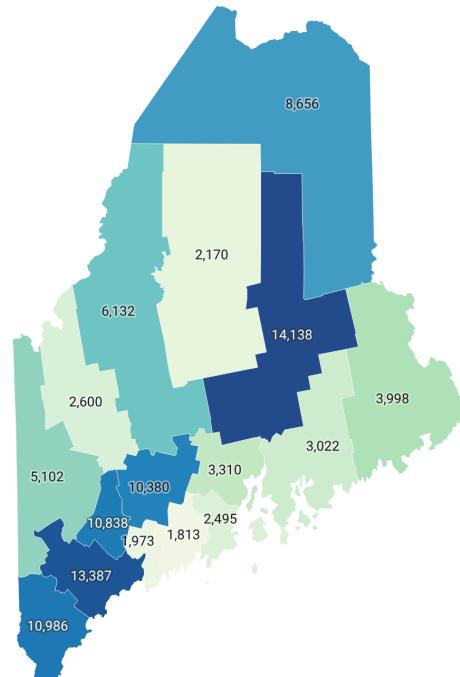


Food insecurity occurs when a household cannot access enough food due to a lack of money and other essential resources. It is often linked to one or multiple factors that lead to food insecurity, creating a cycle that can be hard to break. These factors can be related to household income, expenses, access to affordable health care, the surrounding social and physical environment, and barriers to opportunity which play a role in preventing some households and communities from being food secure.

Source: Maine Children's Alliance • Created with Datawrapper

Households at Risk of Losing Some or All of Their SNAP Benefits by 2034

101,000 Maine households are expected to lose some or all of their SNAP benefits by 2034. The Urban Institute projects a \$122 per-month reduction in average benefits for Maine's families. Using Feeding America's average meal cost for Maine (\$3.76), this equates to the loss of 32 meals each month.



Scale mid-point represents roughly the 50th percentile of county-level data

Map: Maine Children's Alliance • Source: This map assumes between 101,000 households will lose some or all SNAP benefits by 2034, according to The Urban Institute's respective calculations; proportional distribution of funding losses calculated with ACS 2019-2023 data. • Created with Datawrapper