

Testimony in Support of LD 2051 “An Act to Ensure Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Maine”

James Myall, Policy Analyst

January 14, 2026

Good Afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. 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 2051 “An Act to Ensure Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Maine” because MECEP believes that everyone deserves to eat, and that when we keep people fed, we make our economy stronger.

LD 2051 would confirm the state’s existing decades-old policy of ensuring that legally-present immigrants are eligible for food assistance when they are experiencing hardships. Clarifying this policy is especially important in the wake of changes at the federal level which threatens food assistance for tens of thousands of Mainers, including several groups of New Mainers who had previously qualified for federal assistance.

Many of those who will be eligible for state-funded assistance are either waiting for work authorization for the federal government, or have only recently received this authorization. There is broad agreement that our broken immigration system is failing people who want to come to the United States and contribute by working. Applications for employment authorization can take months longer than advertised, leaving New Mainers with no choice but to turn to public assistance. In 2023, the legislature signaled its bipartisan support for overhauling this backwards system and allowing people to work much sooner. And our federal delegation has been pushing for similar modifications to federal law. But until that changes, we need to ensure nobody is left behind just because the federal government is falling short of its promises.

In addition to preventing hardship among these New Mainer families, we know that investment in SNAP is good for the broader economy. People who receive food assistance through SNAP see the doctor less often,¹ and in some cases, the extra support through SNAP may help them find work.² Kids whose parents become eligible for SNAP do better in school³ and live longer, healthier lives.⁴ One study of the long-term outcomes of SNAP participation for children found that an investment of \$1 is returned as \$62 in value over the child’s lifetime.⁵

We know that investments in immigrants pay off over the long-term, especially in a state like Maine where there are more open jobs than there are jobseekers to fill them. A large federal study has found that, in general, support to refugees and asylum-seekers provides a substantial net fiscal benefit.⁶ We also know that here in Maine, immigrants' earnings gradually increase over time while their need for public support declines.⁷

LD 2051 will ensure that New Mainers are not left without critical food assistance at one of the most vulnerable times in their lives, and represents a continued investment in the future of our state. I urge you to vote "ought to pass and I'm happy to take any questions.

Notes

¹ Chloe East, "An Apple A Day? Adult Food Stamp Eligibility And Health Care Utilization Among Immigrants." April 2020. https://www.chloeneast.com/uploads/8/9/9/7/8997263/snap_and_adult_care_4.5.20-merged.pdf

² Bita Fayaz Farkhad, "The Impact of Participation in SNAP on Labor Force Decisions." May 2018. https://jsaw.lib.lehigh.edu/campbell/farkhad_bita.pdf

³ Nisha Beharie, Micaela Mercado and Mary McKay, "A Protective Association between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Children of Economically Strained Households." J Hunger Environ Nutr. 2016 Nov 10;12(2):181–192. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5513186/>

⁴ Chloe East, "The Effect of Food Stamps on Children's Health: Evidence from Immigrants' Changing Eligibility." July 14, 2018. https://www.chloeneast.com/uploads/8/9/9/7/8997263/east_fskids_r_r2.pdf

⁵ Martha Bailey et al, "Is the Social Safety Net a Long-Term Investment? Large-Scale Evidence From the Food Stamps Program." Rev Econ Stud. 2024 May;91(3):1291-1330. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39281422/>

⁶ "New HHS Study Finds Nearly \$124 Billion Positive Fiscal Impact of Refugees and Asylees on the American Economy in a 15-Year Period." US Department of Health and Human Services. Feb 15, 2024. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2024/02/15/new-hhs-study-finds-nearly-124-billion-positive-fiscal-impact-refugees-and-asylees-on-american-economy-15-year-period.html#:~:text=Net%20Fiscal%20Impact%3A%20Refugees%20and,to%20state%20and%20local%20governments.>

⁷ James Myall, "People seeking asylum and refuge benefit Maine's economy — lawmakers need to support them." Maine Center for Economic Policy. Mar 27, 2024. <https://www.mecep.org/blog/people-seeking-asylum-and-refugee-benefit-maines-economy-lawmakers-need-to-support-them/>