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Senator, District 15

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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Augusta, Maine 04333

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR MATTHEW POULIOT

Sponsor of LD 568

“An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives.”

Public Hearing: February 27th

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture Conservation and Forestry. I am Senator Matt Pouliot and I represent Senate District 15, which includes the towns of Augusta, Belgrade, China, Mount Vernon, Sidney and Vassalboro. I am here to present my bill LD 568, “An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives.”

This bill will support the Fund To Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives

- This establishes an ongoing annual general fund appropriation of \$600,000
 - This appropriation was included in the Governor’s budget
 - However the Governor’s budget has this as a one-time allocation and we are advocating for this committee to support an annual appropriation
 - These funds are necessary to fill a new funding gap created in a change at the federal level. This does not close the gap completely, but makes the remaining balance much more manageable for the organizations involved (MFFM, MOFGA, GSFB, etc).
 - These funds will be distributed among the organizations operating nutrition incentive programs based on their program size and need
- This bill also removes the \$50,000 limit on matching contributions from the fund criteria

Nutrition incentive programs in Maine, like Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards, help Mainers who use SNAP buy more fruits and vegetables produced in Maine. These programs increase the purchasing power of SNAP dollars when used at farmers’ markets, farm stands, CSA’s, and small retail locations. SNAP shoppers either get a discount when they’re buying local fruits and vegetables, or they earn bonus bucks when they spend their SNAP dollars on

local foods. Either way, they're incentivized to spend their SNAP on Maine-grown food, and they get extra funds when they do so to buy healthy fruits and vegetables.

This appropriation is a direct investment for communities in all 16 counties, as it leads to more sales for local farms and food producers. It also turns farmers' markets, farm stands, and small stores into food access points, where people with limited food budgets can afford to buy extra food thanks to these nutrition incentive programs. Nutrition incentive programs achieve public health goals while stimulating local economies.

These state funds will leverage federal matching dollars in two ways. First, the federal grants that help support these programs require 1 to 1 matching. Secondly, the federal SNAP dollars that people use to buy food will be redirected to local producers, rather than food produced out of state or out of the country. Thus, for every \$1 the state puts in, we get \$2 from the federal government.

This Fund was originally established in the 130th legislature thanks to the leadership of Rep. Pleucker and others. However, the ultimate funding allocation was a one-time funding allocation at \$25,000, which was an amount that was insufficient to support the good work that this bill seeks to support.

In the last 2 years, the participating outlets have had more than \$2.3 million in sales thanks to Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards. That's direct sales of local food to farmers or small retail stores. As the program grows, so have the funding needs. Federal grant support has been the backbone for these programs since 2015. Many states across the country have established funds to boost the sustainability of these programs and help grow their impact. With a recent change in federal grants, the organizations that run nutrition incentive programs face a funding gap of more than \$600,000 annually. This gap is stretching organizational resources and is resulting in farmers having to fundraise during winter months to keep their programs afloat. This fund will substantially close the funding gap and allow the partner organizations to reach serve communities, improving their health and food access and further bolstering the local food economy across Maine.

Coming up, you will hear from community partners, farmers, and people experiencing food insecurity on the reasons why this funding is so important and the ways in which the funds will be spent. Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.