

PARTNERING TO END HUNGER



Good Shepherd

FOOD BANK OF MAINE

February 27, 2023

Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine testimony to the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry in support of LD 568, An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives.

To Chairperson Ingwersen, Chairperson Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry ,

My name is Courtney Kennedy, and I am the Director of Nutrition for Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. I am here today to express our support, and ask for your support, of LD 568, An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives.

The mission of Good Shepherd Food Bank is to eliminate hunger in Maine by improving access to nutritious food for people in need, building strong community partnerships, and mobilizing the public in the fight to end hunger. Good Shepherd Food Bank works in partnership with nearly 600 organizations to help distribute food to community members in need. Our network of partner agencies includes food pantries, meal sites, senior centers, school programs, and healthcare facilities. In our work centering equity, we are increasingly working with communities of color to address food security in a culturally responsive way.

In addition to our traditional partner network, Good Shepherd Food Bank collaborates with small grocers and food retailer to oversee Farm Fresh Rewards. With Farm Fresh Rewards, shoppers using SNAP/EBT earn bonus dollars for Maine-grown fruit and vegetables. Incentives programs such as Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards encourages shoppers to spend their SNAP dollars on healthy product by providing financial incentives on fruits and vegetables. SNAP incentives not only improve healthy food access and nutrition among SNAP participants, they also support farmers and small businesses, and stimulate the local economy. Since the inception of Farm Fresh Rewards in Maine, over \$500,000 of incentives have been redeemed on Maine local product by SNAP shoppers- showing growth year over year. Good Shepherd Food Bank feels strongly about the positive impacts this program has on the wellness of food insecure Mainers.

Our Farm Fresh Rewards stores are deeply embedded in their communities and have shared the impact that this program has had on SNAP shoppers. Families can prioritize eating local. As a food strategy for Maine we recognize the sustainable impact this program has on not only our farmers, but also our environment and our communities. Farm Fresh Rewards store include Belfast Co-op, Berry Fruit Farm, Blue Hill Co-op, Food Share Co-op, Gardner Co-op, Ginny's Natural Corner, Good Turn Co-op, Jordan's Farm, Machias Marketplace, Marsh River Co-op, Portland Co-op, Rising Tide Co-op, Rosemont-Munjoy Hill, Royal River Natural Foods, Sheepscot General Store and Spice and Grain.

I want to share with you a little about Virginia Jewel or as her community knows her as Ginny of Ginny's Natural Corner. Ginny not only takes the time to engage her Farm Fresh Rewards shoppers, but she is even

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willing to meet them at the Farmers' Market to share with them ways that they can shop not only at her store in Skowhegan but also take advantage of the nutrient full local fruits and vegetables at the Skowhegan Farmers' Market.

Another example is the team at the Portland Coop who are interested in responding to the ever-growing diverse shoppers they are seeing in their store. By making sure that they have culturally relevant local produce and partnering with local farms to simulate opportunity for both the shoppers and the farmers find beneficial. Building on the impact of supporting more diverse farms and building access to foods that are familiar to many shoppers who now call Maine home.

SNAP/EBT shoppers share over and over that they get to prioritize local for their families, allowing them to contribute to a strong and healthy community. I have spoken to program users who are thankful that they do not have to choose between purchasing foods that are nutrient void because they cost less, but that they can purchase and extend their food dollars on local, healthy produce for their families. Extra funds for SNAP/EBT shoppers to purchase fruits and vegetables means that more fruits and vegetables are consumed; this results in improved health, and decreased diet related diseases in program users.

We believe there is a solution to the problem of hunger in Maine. Working in partnership with the state legislature we can and will help reduce the impact of hunger in our state and make Maine a stronger, better place to work and live. Because only partial funding for Farm Fresh Rewards is awarded through Gus Schumackers Incentive Program (GusNIP) which requires a non-profit or government agencies to apply and GusNIP requires a dollar-for-dollar match for programming. We ask you for your support in ensuring that Maine food insecure families have access to fresh, local and nutritious foods!

Sincerely,

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