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Testimony of Rep. Sean Paulhus presenting

**LD 87, An Act to Permit Emergency Funding for Food Banks When a State of Emergency Is Declared
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government**

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and distinguished members of the State and Local Government Committee, I am Sean Paulhus, Representative for House District 50, the city of Bath. I am glad to be here to present **LD 87, An Act to Permit Emergency Funding for Food Banks When a State of Emergency Is Declared.**

This bill authorizes the governor to distribute up to \$400,000 from the state's budget stabilization fund to food banks throughout Maine when our state enters a period of civil emergency. We know that the pandemic caused such sudden economic devastation and food insecurity that food banks across the state experienced major spikes in demand. Even before the pandemic, one in four Mainers reported they would have to borrow money or sell something to cover an unexpected expense of just \$400.¹ One in five Mainers say they would have no way to cover that cost at all. That is how we ended up with so many first-time visitors to food banks across the state.

Additionally, the nature of the pandemic created logistical challenges with financial hurdles that food banks had to adapt to. Like the budget of those who rely on them, the budgets of most food banks are extremely tight. The Mills administration worked very hard to address these struggles on both the supply and the demand side, and it deserves credit for adapting on the fly. We don't know when the next crisis will arrive or what its nature will be. But with the frequency of disasters around the world increasing, it's not a matter of if it will happen - it's a matter of when.

In a way, we were very lucky that the 129th Legislature was already in session when COVID-19 found its way into Maine. We authorized the governor to take swift action to save lives and access crucial federal funding and we passed legislation to protect our residents as they began to face health crises and massive unemployment. We need strong tools in place to meet immediate needs. The Legislature won't always be in session or in a position to return to session when future crises make themselves known. LD 87 is a way to make sure that people across Maine can take advantage of the experience and expertise of those already best equipped to feed others: our network of food banks. It allows any governor to act immediately to ensure that those who bear the worst of a disaster will know that a plate of food for them and their children is never too far out of reach.

I appreciate the committee's thoughtfulness on an issue I know matters a great deal to all of us, and I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

¹ <https://www.mecep.org/blog/could-you-cover-an-unexpected-400-expense-nearly-half-of-mainers-could-not/>