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United Way
of Southern Maine



Good Morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

My name is Natalie Varrallo and I am the Preble Street Food Programs Director and oversee the Food Security Hub. Preble Street asks you to support LD 1612: An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture. The Preble Street Food Security Hub is an innovative approach to ending food insecurity in Maine, utilizing a comprehensive and holistic design to address the inequalities in the food system. The Food Security Hub is a crucial step in Maine's plan to end hunger by 2030. This one-time funding would allow dramatically increased meal production and preservation space, adding essential cooking, processing, including freezing, blanching and storage capacity.

Most importantly, it would enable increased farm partnerships and expanded statewide meal distribution.

In partnership with Good Shepherd Food Bank's transportation system, we will be able to distribute meals across the state. Good Shepherd has an extensive network of food delivery locations throughout Maine (see attached map), and their trucks will distribute Preble Street frozen prepared meals to thousands of individuals experiencing food insecurity. Whether these frozen prepared meals go to food banks, senior meal sites or to an area facing an emergency situation, such as a natural disaster or a pandemic, the Food Security Hub will be ready to respond with individually prepared nutritious meals for that community.

Good Shepherd Food Bank's transportation system will also help expand our partnerships with farms around the state, picking up and delivering produce to the Food Security Hub for processing and meal production. Community partnerships are an essential part of the Food Hub design, and this partnership adds substantial food resources to Good Shepherd's existing transportation efforts.

With the Food Security Hub, the state has a unique opportunity to prevent food waste while addressing food insecurity. As a food production facility, soup kitchen and food pantry, we are at the end of the food supply chain. We receive donations from dozens of local organizations and partners, such as Hannaford,

Whole Foods, and Good Shepherd Food Bank. Every week we receive over 8,000 pounds of rescued food products. The Food Security Hub sorts and processes these donations to extend their life, capturing vital nutrients while limiting food waste. This year we have prevented over 300,000 pounds of Maine-grown produce from ending up in landfills, turning potential food waste into food security resources that are essential to meal production and emergency food box distribution efforts.

Our food waste prevention practices come with additional benefits. By extending the life of donations, we have the financial flexibility to purchase other Maine-grown products, supporting the Maine food system. Working to avoid food waste prompts us to develop creative, diverse, and seasonal meals for low-income people, highlighting the Maine food system for marginalized community members.

Preble Street is currently distributing over 2,000 meals a day and dozens of food boxes to 26 towns. This one-time state funding for the Food Security Hub will enable us to prepare 10,000 seasonal, nutritious meals prepared with Maine-grown produce for the entire state of Maine, from Kittery to Caribou.

We have already established farm partnerships with Jordan's Farm and Liberation Farms. Full funding of the Food Security Hub will allow us to expand our partnerships with farms across the state. Our goal is to support heritage farms, helping to enhance the state's agricultural roots. We believe that the solution to food insecurity in Maine is to work within our state and utilize seasonal produce when available.

A majority of the existing research shows that current soup kitchen meals across the country do not provide consistent adequate nutrition. These meals that low income individuals and families must rely on are often high in carbohydrates, sugars, and fats, while lacking in essential vitamins and minerals. An extensive literature review of soup kitchen nutrition found that the average caloric and nutritional content of the meals studied leads to nutritional imbalances and nutrition related diseases such as high blood pressure and heart disease. Additionally, Katie Martin found that “people who visit food pantries often have a double burden of food insecurity and chronic diseases, including both physical and mental health challenges. They are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, and heart disease” (Martin, 2021, p. 92). The Food Security Hub is designed to move beyond calories, prioritizing nutrition for individuals experiencing food insecurity in Maine.

Maine ranks sixth in the nation for hunger, or very low food security. We have the highest rate of food insecurity in New England. The Food Security Hub will provide direct hunger relief by producing and distributing nutritious meals and hunger solutions by collaborating with advocacy partners including the Food Justice Coalition, people with lived experience of food insecurity, Good Shepherd Food Bank, Cumberland County Food Security Coalition, Maine SNAP Alliance, working on Maine's Plan to End Hunger by 2030.

Preble Street has raised over \$7 million of public and private funding to date. There is an attachment to my testimony that provides details of that funding, which includes federal, county, and municipal funding as well as generous private foundation gifts. With the cost estimated to be

between \$10 and \$12 million, Preble Street is also planning to finance a portion of the renovation, with a plan to aggressively pay down the loan.

This one-time allotment of \$2 million from the State of Maine will both demonstrate the State's commitment to this effort but, most importantly, will be the funding that is needed for Preble Street to bring this project to fruition.

Food Justice has been my profession and passion for many years. I hold a B.S. in Botany and Sustainable Agriculture and a Sustainable Focused Master of Business Administration. In addition, I have a Master of Science in Sustainable Food Systems with an emphasis on Sustainable Entrepreneurship and a Master of Science in Food System Social Justice.

The Food Security Hub is designed to support a sustainable food economy. Working to increase nutrition, increase farm partnership, and community collaboration, the Food Security Hub can provide a much-needed resource to the state of Maine.

Together we can end hunger. Please vote to support LD 1612: An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture.

Thank you.

References

Martin, K.S. (2021). Reinventing Food Banks and Pantries. New Tools to End Hunger. Washington D.C.: Island Press.

FOOD INSECURITY IN MAINE

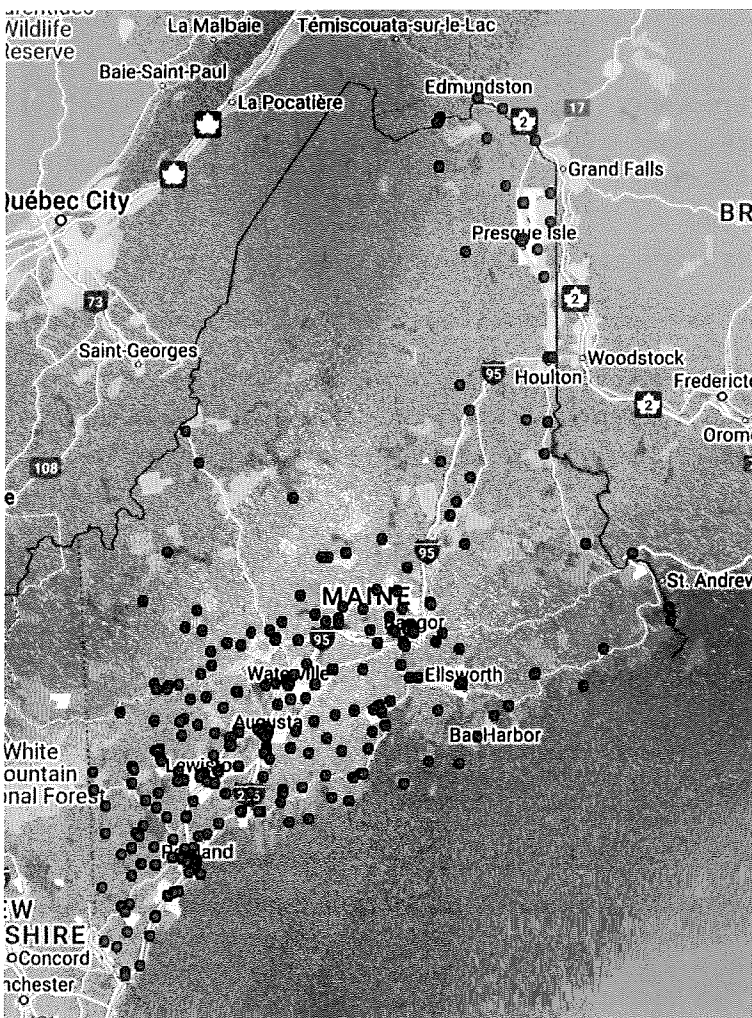
Hunger is an everyday reality for far too many Mainers. According to "Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030," Food insecurity in Maine is more common and more severe than elsewhere in the United States and New England. Food insecurity is a crisis in Maine, impacting 11.4% of Maine households. [1] One in six children in the state is food insecure, and People of Color continue to be among the hardest hit by food insecurity. [2]

Black (21.7%) and Latinx (17.2%) households were disproportionately impacted by food insecurity in 2020, with food insecurity rates triple and double the rate of White families (7.1%), respectively. [3] In Maine, at only 1.7% of the total population, 28% of households headed by people of color were food insecure, according to Amjambo! Africa.

With this increase in food insecurity and resulting production needs, Maine faces an acute need for a food production and distribution facility with sufficient space and equipment, as well as a place for community collaboration and innovation where we can work collectively to combat hunger.

Preble Street is creating the Food Security Hub to answer that need.

FOOD SECURITY HUB IMPACT



Map: Good Shepherd Food Bank Food Map & distribution network

Utilizing Good Shepherd Food Bank's existing transportation routes will allow meals prepared at the Food Security Hub to be distributed throughout the state of Maine to those in need.

FOOD SECURITY HUB VISION

Preble Street is developing a sustainable, comprehensive, and collaborative approach dedicated to ending hunger in Maine. The **Preble Street Food Security Hub** will provide a dynamic space to combat food insecurity through partnerships and collaboration — bringing more meals and grocery boxes to clients in need.

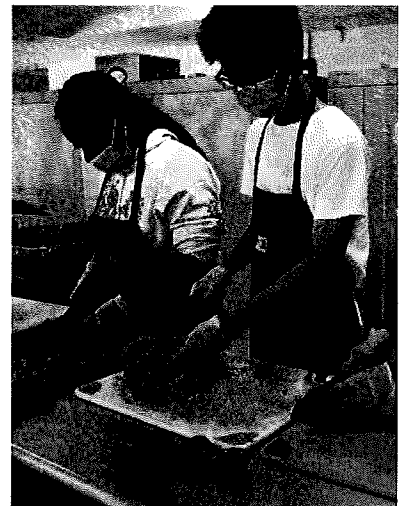
Employing one central location, multiple organizations can address food access and food justice in creative ways under the same roof. The building will function as an industrial kitchen, food processing center, educational/vocational site, office space, and conference center. This cohesive effort will build economies of scale and increase awareness of and support for anti-hunger efforts, combating hunger and creating a sustainable food system in Maine. **In addition, the Food Security Hub will promote long-term sustainable solutions to improve food security and achieve food justice while supporting local agriculture through partnerships with small-scale farms growing local produce.**

The Food Security Hub will include:

- **Industrial Kitchen:** A production facility with the space and equipment necessary to efficiently produce a large volume of healthy meals. The facility will feature space for staff, client, and volunteer activities and educational/vocational opportunities.
- **Processing Center:** Because Maine has a short growing season, processing and preserving farm produce is key to improving the nutrition and sustainability of Preble Street meals. Utilizing blanchers, blast freezers, and dehydrators, the Food Security Hub will mitigate waste and increase access to nutritious fruits and vegetables year-round.
- **Conference Center and Office Space:** Preble Street will co-locate with several other anti-hunger organizations to unite the skills and strengths of complementary organizations and avoid duplicating efforts. There will also be dedicated space to host discussions and events about ending hunger in Maine.



This effort will decrease food insecurity in the state, create strong and effective community partnerships, bolster local agriculture and environmental sustainability, and play a vital role in the state of Maine's emergency preparedness.



MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY & PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

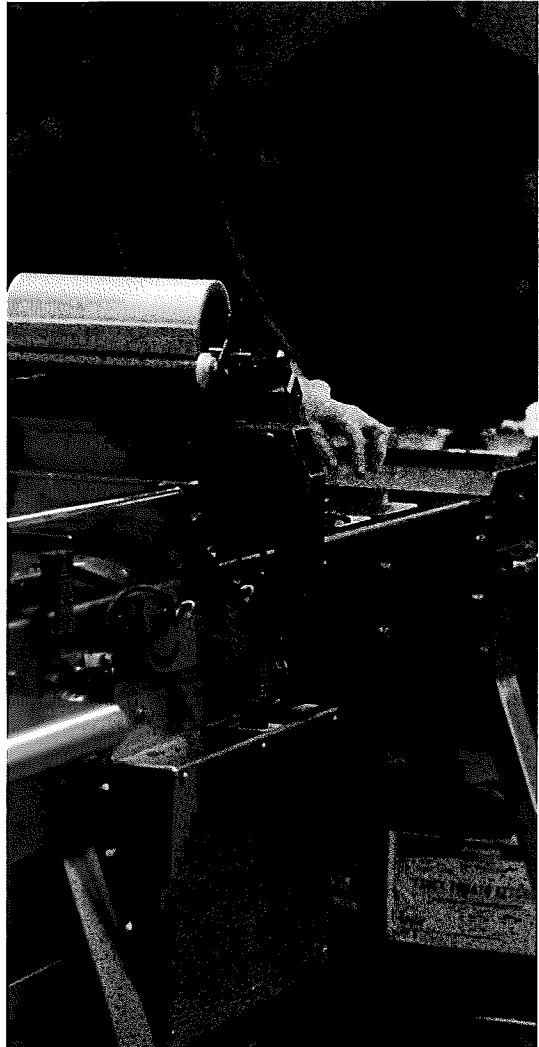
Currently, with the expansion of the Food Security Hub underway, the Preble Street Food Programs team can prepare approximately 2,000 nutritious and delicious meals each day in the current space, which are distributed to:

- Individuals and families experiencing homelessness
- YMCA
- Boys & Girls Clubs

Once the Food Security Hub is complete, we anticipate being about to create up to **10,000 meals per day for distribution throughout the state.**

For decades, Preble Street has fed people impacted by various emergencies and natural disasters, from the Ice Storm of 1998 to the pandemic, and other events. By increasing our processing and freezer capacity, when fully realized, the Food Security Hub will have **50,000 frozen, prepared meals on-hand and available for future emergencies.** Those meals, in addition to the 10,000 meals that the Food Security Hub will be able to produce daily, will be a critical component of Maine's emergency preparedness operational plans.

The Preble Street Food Security Hub is already increasing food security in Maine, having distributed **over 453,000 meals via grocery boxes and food drops to residents of more than 26 cities and towns across southern Maine in the last year.** But we are thinking big and have a vision to combat food insecurity through partnerships and collaboration throughout Maine — bringing more meals and grocery boxes to people in need.



Preble Street is seeking support to realize the vision for the Preble Street Food Security Hub and the next generation of solutions to hunger in Maine.

Preble Street Food Security Hub

a sustainable, comprehensive, and collaborative approach
dedicated to ending hunger in Maine



Cost to Complete: \$10-12 Million*
Raised to Date: \$7 Million

Support for the Food Security Hub includes:

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Public Grants (ARPA, CDBG, & USDA NIFA) | \$3 Million |
| FY23 Congressional Appropriation | \$1 Million |
| John T. Gorman Foundation | \$1 Million |
| Good Shepherd Food Bank | \$500,000 |
| Hannaford Charitable Foundation | \$250,000 |
| Elmina B. Sewell | \$90,000 |
| Susan & Fritz Onion | \$75,000 |
| The Kresge Foundation | \$36,000 |
| Additional Private Donors | \$1 Million+ |
| Preble Street Financing | \$1-3 Million |
| One Time Support from the State of Maine via LD 1612 | \$2 Million |

TOTAL \$10-12 Million

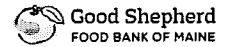
**includes \$4 Million for building purchase*

Preble Street Food Security Hub

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering with Maine anti-hunger and social justice organizations, the Preble Street Food Security Hub (FSH) will maximize the strengths of current partners and create new alliances.

A key partner in this effort is **Good Shepherd Food Bank**, which sources and distributes food to more than 500 community-based organizations working statewide to improve access to nutritious food for Mainers experiencing hunger. Recognizing that a “meals-to-go” model offered not only optimal safety during a public health crisis but also improved client experience, GSF is eager to support this partnership that fills a critical gap in “to-go” meal options, increases the capacity for culturally appropriate meals, and creates space for partners to collaborate on strategies to end hunger in Maine.



Hannaford Charitable Foundation The **Hannaford Charitable Foundation**, whose mission is to invest in creating and sustaining healthy communities in their five-state region by providing financial support to nonprofit organizations and programs that focus on improvement of the root causes impacting the quality of life for customers, associates and neighbors, is also a key supporter of the Food Security Hub. Hannaford understands that ending hunger in Maine requires new, community-centered resources such as the FSH, which will not only help connect those at risk of going hungry with easy-to-access meals but also provide a space for people to work together toward ensuring that no one goes without the nutritious food they need.

The **Cumberland County Food Security Council (CCFSC)** is also a partner. CCFSC initiates and facilitates collaborative action toward a just, resilient, and sustainable food system that ensures equitable access for all people to enough healthy food. CCFSC includes people with the lived experience of poverty, community leaders, and representatives from local food security organizations who are leading the efforts to end hunger in Cumberland County and across Maine.



We know that meeting the food security needs of our community requires creative thinking, new approaches, and expanded resources, and partnering with experienced and dedicated organizations is critical to this effort. The partners listed above are just three of the more than 40 Maine programs, facilities, farms, and nonprofits currently partnering with Preble Street on food security in Maine. Collaboration and partnership will play a key role in achieving our vision for state-wide impact and we will continue to pursue new relationships across the state.

ABOUT PREBLE STREET

Preble Street has over 45 years of experience developing and implementing solutions-oriented best practice programs and has the necessary fiscal control and accounting procedures in place. Preble Street operates the largest emergency food service program in northern New England and currently distribute thousands of meals a day. With decades of experience and innovation in continuing to provide emergency food throughout the pandemic, Preble Street is prepared to undertake this comprehensive approach to ending hunger in Maine.

CITATIONS

- [1] Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. pp 12-13.
- [2] Feeding America. Hunger in Maine. Accessed on 4/18/2023 from: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maine>
- [3] Food Research & Action Center. National Brief on Census/USDA Food Insecurity Data. Accessed on 4/18/2023 from: <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/sep-8-national-brief-on-food-insecurity-data>



Preble Street

Turning Hunger and Homelessness into Opportunity and Hope