



April 19, 2023

Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine testimony to the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry in support of LD 1612, An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture.

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

My name is Kristen Miale, and I am the President of Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine. I am here today to express our support, and ask for your support, of LD 1612, An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture.

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.

We are thrilled by the opportunity our partnership with the Preble Street Food Security Hub presents to every Mainer facing hunger. With Good Shepherd Food Bank's infrastructure to store and distribute food throughout a service area that spans 35,000 square miles, this partnership will enable us to provide frozen, nutrient-dense meals throughout the whole state.

One of the metrics the Food Bank uses to measure our work is the meal gap. The meal gap is the number of meals that households are missing because they do not have the resources to purchase the food they need. Maine's current meal gap is 30.2 million meals. These are the meals that are still needed after considering the impact of state and federal support programs such as SNAP. The Food Bank is projecting we'll distribute 24 million meals this year, leaving 6 million meals needed in Maine.

Our partnership with the Preble Street Food Security Hub is an opportunity to narrow that meal gap. We plan to order meals from Preble Street and our nearly 600 partner organizations will be able to order these meals like any other food we distribute. We will use our capacity to store frozen meals in our distribution centers' freezers and they will be distributed on our trucks to partners statewide. Good Shepherd Food Bank does not process food, but we do have the transportation infrastructure and network of food pantries/partner organizations to ensure these nourishing meals are provided to those in need everywhere in our state. Again, we cannot emphasize enough, these meals are a statewide resource through our partnership.

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PARTNERING TO END HUNGER



Good Shepherd

FOOD BANK OF MAINE

In January of this year, a cost of living adjustment (COLA) was applied to Social Security Benefits. Pandemic Emergency Allotments ended in February. As the initial excitement of the COLA increase faded, reality set in. This COLA increase resulted in a decrease in SNAP benefits for older Mainers throughout the state. It was this issue that led Kelly Sirimoglu, the Executive Director of the Piscataquis Regional Food Center (PRFC) to reach out to our advocacy team. Kelly cried with us as she described the empty shelves at PRFC with people in need, especially older Mainers, still coming through the door in need of food. Many of these older Mainers would benefit from the meals made at the Food Security Hub. I invite you to imagine the dignity and lifeline these carefully crafted meals made from scratch with local Maine ingredients will afford older Mainers in rural and urban areas alike.

This innovative collaboration leans into both of our organizations' areas of expertise to provide thoughtfully prepared meals with local ingredients to all Mainers experiencing hunger. We are thankful for this partnership. Together we can do so much!

And we need you as well. Please vote in favor of this funding, and encourage your colleagues to do the same.

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. We ask you for your support in ensuring that Maine food insecure families have access to fresh, local and nutritious foods!

Sincerely,

Kristen Miale

President, Good Shepherd Food Bank