

Hello Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Carolyn Silvius, and I am an Advocate with Homeless Voices for Justice. I am here today to ask that you please vote in favor of LD1612: An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture.

The Preble Street Food Security Hub currently provides 2,000 hot meals to communities in 26 different towns across Southern Maine. These meals go to Preble Street shelters, City of Portland shelters, the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club of Southern Maine, and folks facing unsheltered homelessness in the City of Portland. These 2000 meals aren't even close to meeting the need. This grant could make it possible to serve up to 10,000 meals, which would come much closer to fulfilling the requirements.

Along with prepared meals, the Food Security Hub is also able to provide food boxes to food-insecure families and individuals. These food boxes are customizable to the needs of families and individuals, and can include fruits, vegetables, non-perishable goods, packaged meals, and occasionally non-food items such as shampoos, soaps, and other necessary goods. These food boxes can be delivered to folks at their homes for no cost through a partnership between Preble Street and DoorDash, or picked up at the Food Security Hub and delivered by case workers. I, along with several others, receive food boxes through the project in which I live, and although, a food box only consists of a couple day's food, it saves me enough to make my SNAP benefits go a bit further, and provides me with fresh fruit and vegetables which I, otherwise might have difficulty being able to afford.

Another goal of the Food Security Hub is to continue furthering food equity and food justice in all of our programs, as well as in the wider community. In the past year, the Maine Hunger Initiative began convening a group of individuals with lived experience of food insecurity to inform Preble Street Food Programs and work to further food security advocacy. This group, the Food Justice Coalition, works closely with the Food Security Hub to ensure that food access within the community is a collaborative and informed effort. I will be working with Washington Gardens staff members on projects such as composting and gardening to make food more available to all members of our community.

At a time of rising food costs, it is more important than ever that people have access to healthy and nutritious food options, regardless of their socioeconomic status. The current cost of food is forcing Mainers to make difficult decisions as they are forced to cut costs to feed themselves and their families. Providing this one-time funding to the Food Security Hub will help to ensure that more Mainers have access to the food resources they need, helping to bridge the gaps in our food system, and further food equity for all. Thank you for your time and consideration, and please vote to pass LD1612.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Silvius

Advocate, Homeless Voices For Justice