



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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***Testimony of Representative Holly B. Stover presenting  
LD 1584, An Act to Provide Funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program  
to Temporarily Restore Benefits Being Reduced by the Federal Government  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services***

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Holly Stover, and I proudly serve as the representative of the Towns of Boothbay, Boothbay Harbor, Edgecomb, Southport, South Bristol and Westport Island. I am here to present *LD 1584, An Act to Provide Funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to Temporarily Restore Benefits Being Reduced by the Federal Government*.

Food insecurity is the limited or unknown availability of nutritional and safe foods for everyone in a household to meet their basic needs. In my County, Lincoln County, it is estimated that 13.4% or 4,853 people do not have enough food to eat every day. While my community has a few programs and services to address food insecurity, more solutions are needed. Maine's rates of food insecurity are generally higher than in other parts of New England. As a result, a higher percentage of Mainers are eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the federal food supplement program.

For nearly three years, under the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the federal government provided emergency benefit allotments through the SNAP program. LD 1584 would provide a one-time appropriation that will allow for an extension to the emergency benefits previously provided with federal dollars. This bill would extend the benefit for six months but on a decreasing basis. By decreasing the allotment gradually rather than ending the program abruptly as has happened in the past, families are better able to prepare. The impact for an individual or a family is so dramatic that I think it is responsible that we think through the ramifications of what these changing benefits will mean to people in communities across Maine.

I first became aware of the significant impact these changes have when an 82-year-old woman came to my office in late January. She had a letter outlining that in March 2023, she would lose the \$265 monthly SNAP benefit she has relied on for the past three years. Her benefits would drop back down to \$27 a month. She was already visiting our local food pantry and living in subsidized housing and questioned how she would survive on that level of assistance.

As we think about the impacts that the end of pandemic assistance will bring, we must also consider the total loss to the economy. For three years, Maine retailers could count on people spending those SNAP dollars. Now, they face a \$17 million per month loss in revenue.

We will see dramatic responses over the next several months as the fiscal impact of the SNAP reductions take hold. It could increase inflationary costs on basic food items as stores struggle to remain open and keep people employed. Unfortunately, there was no planning put into place to phase out SNAP benefits for individuals or for Maine stores. It is not feasible to simply return to a pre-pandemic state and ask retailers to just absorb a loss of \$17 million per month.

I am the Director of a nonprofit agency that offers eight different programs to help our neighbors in need. In October 2022, we opened a “Community Fridge” program, a 24/7 food access point with a refrigerator, freezer and shelves. Since we are unlocked and have no “fixed” hours, we are not eligible to participate as Good Shepherd Food Bank members. Because of this, we must source food through donations and our local food insecurity hub. It is a help-yourself shed, and even though we source and place food there daily, we cannot keep it stocked consistently. Just last month, we saw a significant increase in demand.

This bill is a late answer to our state’s significant food insecurity crisis. It would have been a proactive and thoughtful discussion one or two years ago, but that did not happen. We are reacting rather than preparing, which is certainly not the best way to set good public policy.

I also know that as Mainers and as lawmakers, we can do better for our most vulnerable children and adults. There are other DHHS-sponsored food programs; if those were sufficient, we likely would not be considering other options to help keep Mainers fed.

In closing, I encourage the Health and Human Services Committee to think about other creative ways to address food insecurity in this State. It is clear that a general fund request of nearly \$50 million is a big reach, and I respect how difficult this discussion and decision may be.

We know this is a significant problem in our state and not something we can ignore or accept.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I am available to answer any questions you might have.