

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Lisa Franklin. I am a resident of Portland and an advocate with Homeless Voices for Justice, a group of people with lived experience of homelessness advocating for change in our community. I am here today to testify in support of LD1584: An Act to Provide Funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to Temporarily Restore Benefits Being Reduced by the Federal Government.

As I'm sure you all are aware, the price of food is at an all time high. Generally, food prices increase about 2% a year, but from 2021-22, there was an 11% increase. From March 2022-2023, prices jumped another 8.5%. While this affects everyone in our community, it is especially hard hitting for the most vulnerable among us. I believe that the emergency status of this bill is evidence enough that the situation with SNAP is dire. Though the extra SNAP that we received during the pandemic were called "emergency allotments," they brought many SNAP recipients just to the brink of stability. It was hardly a moment of excess or abundance. The pandemic made clear that the landscape of food insecurity across the country, and especially in Maine, is much starker than we might have thought. The emergency standards for food insecurity and SNAP benefits are just barely enough to meet people's basic needs.

In a country where we have so much prosperity and abundance, having so many people unable to meet their basic nutritional needs is criminal. Ensuring that all Mainers are sufficiently fed has a ripple effect; nourished individuals yield stronger communities. In my experience when I was homeless, just being able to have enough food each day brought a genuine level of comfort and security to my life. It felt like an entry point to stability.

Nutrition is the foundation of our wellbeing—essential to human life. Among the interconnected challenges that people face in poverty, food is one of the most profound. It is extremely difficult to make progress in other areas—housing, work, substance use and mental health treatment, when your most basic need for nutrition is not being sufficiently met.

Any help is better than no help, especially for people with the greatest need. While I realize this reinstatement of maximum benefits is temporary, it will still be dramatically impactful to thousands of Mainers. Though ideally, the minimum SNAP benefits would be high enough not to leave people in desperate situations, and the implementation of higher benefits would extend beyond a few months, this is a good beginning. I urge you to vote in support of LD1584.

Thank you.