

Testimony of Jennifer Stonebraker testifying in support of LD 2093.

January 22, 2024

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and esteemed members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee.

My name is Jennifer Stonebraker, and I am the executive director of the Bowdoinham Food Pantry in Bowdoinham, Maine. Our organization is committed to removing barriers and providing access to healthy, sustaining food. Our services are available to anyone in our community.

We have directly witnessed the harmful health implications of food insecurity on our community members. Individuals with low incomes are particularly vulnerable to diet-related, preventable illness.

For the past two years, the Bowdoinham Food Pantry has staffed the SNAP booth at the Bowdoinham Farmers' Market, handling all SNAP transactions. We have seen SNAP use double in these past two years – allowing SNAP recipients to buy directly from farmers through the Maine Harvest Bucks initiative while putting money directly into the pockets of local farmers. Farmers who are vital members of our community, and our neighbors.

This tells me two things.

Firstly - our low income neighbors DESIRE to eat fresh, nutritious and local food.

Secondly - Nutrition incentive programs work. Not only to incentivize consumption of fresh, nutritious and local food, but to also reduce the stigma surrounding the farmers' market experience.

Markets are a space for connection and community, and should be accessible, inclusive and welcoming to all. Access to nutritious and locally-sourced food should never be considered a luxury, and all market shoppers should be able to participate in farmers' markets with dignity, irrespective of their budget.

LD 2093 will allow the success we have seen to continue and expand. I urge you to support this important LD.

Thank you.

Jennifer Stonebraker

Executive Director

Bowdoinham Food Pantry