



Senator Rotundo, Senator Baldacci, Representative Sachs, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees:

My name is Simane Ibrahim, and I am a Community Health Worker and Program Assistant at Maine Access Immigrant Network (MAIN). MAIN is a health and social services organization in Portland, Maine that works to bridge access to resources for immigrants and build a stronger, multicultural community. We oppose part QQ of the Governor's supplemental budget which would take food assistance away from some immigrants while they're still looking for work.

This change would be catastrophic for our community. It will be disastrous, and that burden will fall to us. MAIN already sees an average of 400 people per month and most of them come to us for help finding a job. Sometimes we even have to turn people away because we don't have enough staff to help and we're not a job placement agency. Everyone is so eager to work, but it's not as simple as just applying for work authorization and getting a job. Having a work permit doesn't magically offer you financial security. It's not a magic wand. There are jobs, yes, but the employers make it so difficult for us. We work with recruiters who promise to call us back and never do. We help people update their resumes, communicate with employers, and apply for jobs like laundry services and they still take weeks to get back to them. Meanwhile, the community members are calling us every day asking if we've heard anything and when they can start their job. Our only option is to help them apply for benefits and refer them to food pantries.

No one wants to be dependent on benefits, but they don't have any other resources, so they rely on SNAP to feed their families. Due to the high cost of housing, most of the money they receive from General Assistance is going to pay the rent so they might have a few dollars left over at the end of the month for food and most people we work with have young kids. GA also requires you to apply for food stamps and other benefits before you are eligible for any assistance, so people are jumping through hoops and going from place to place looking for help. Some people also have dietary issues and they depend on SNAP to purchase the food they need. If you make cuts to SNAP benefits, we are going to see people get sicker because they can't eat. This is also going to have impacts on our health care system and most of the parents we work with only qualify for Emergency MaineCare or free care through the hospitals.

The despair is overwhelming. The trauma of the journey to get here is overwhelming. I can relate because I was once an asylum seeker, but I've never seen this before. We have people who come to us who are starving. Sometimes we even collect some money amongst the staff so we can help a community member buy groceries. Hunger is always shocking, but you might expect this of an undeveloped country in Africa. The last thing you think you would worry about in the United States is food. This is a re-traumatization. It's inhumane.

As a human being, would you expect someone to feed their kids and not feed themselves and then wake up and go to work? This person cannot work if they cannot eat. You need to breathe air, you need to drink water, you need to eat—it's not a luxury or a privilege, it's a necessity.

We invite you to our office to see what it looks like on the ground. Please oppose cuts to state-funded SNAP benefits and invest in the resources that people need to be healthy and find work.

We welcome your help,
Simane Ibrahim