



March 6, 2025

## **Testimony in support of LD 415, An Act to Support Hunger Prevention in Maine**

Good Morning Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of LD 415, the Mainers Feeding Mainers program and the farmers and neighbors who rely on it.

My name is Silvan Shawe and I am the Director at Cultivating Community, a non-profit with a mission to grow food justice in Greater Portland by providing education, resources, and opportunities to cultivate and share culturally familiar food.

For nearly a decade, we have been a Mainers Feeding Mainers partner, supporting immigrant farmers in our Community Farm Programs to build independent farm businesses. Last year we delivered \$115,000 worth of fresh culturally familiar produce like amaranth greens, roselle, and African eggplant to local food pantries - fresh foods that would not otherwise be accessible.

Hunger is a political choice and I am also am testifying as someone who has relied on food assistance and acutely knows the feeling of how going to a food pantry can be an empowering or shameful experience. In this moment, when the federal programs that our food system depends on and that have helped families and farmers make ends meet are being cut, I am asking Maine to step up, please not only support this bill but urge your colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to do the same. Maine already has the highest hunger rate in New England, for immigrants of color the rate of hunger is over 50%. Without essential programs like Mainers Feeding Mainers more people will go hungry and farms will not make it through the season. This is a lifeline with multiplying benefits across our communities.

I also want to commend Good Shepherd Food Bank's staff on their excellent administration of this program that enables farmers build direct relationships with their local food pantries, strengthening our local food system and benefitting us all.

Thank you,

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