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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 415

An Act to Support Hunger Prevention in Maine

March 6, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Michelle Webb. I am the Director of the Agricultural Resource Development (ARD) Division within the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) neither for nor against LD 415, "*An Act to Support Hunger Prevention in Maine.*"

The Bureau of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources has several important constituencies. Chief among them are farmers, whom we serve with technical assistance, food safety resources, financial tools, grant programs, market development support, and more. Another is Maine people experiencing food insecurity, whom we serve with programs like the Emergency Food Assistance Program, Maine Senior FarmShare, and Hunters for the Hungry.

Since 2019, Maine's state budgets have included \$1 million annually to provide "ongoing funding to contract with nonprofit organizations that provide statewide hunger relief services." The intent behind that money is straightforward: buy food from Maine farmers and distribute that food to Maine families in need.

Since the Legislature first made this appropriation, the money has gone to the Good Shepherd Food Bank to partially fund its Mainers Feeding Mainers program. That program includes 93 Maine farms and food producers and currently provides food to emergency relief organizations in all 16 counties of the state, totaling 600 emergency food distribution organizations.

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The program works by forming forward-purchasing agreements with local farmers and creating safe and efficient distribution channels to provide fresh, local food to Mainers experiencing food insecurity.

LD 415 would double the existing annual appropriation from \$1 million to \$2 million.
Thank you for your time. I would happily answer any questions now or at the work session.