

Greetings Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Elizabeth Alvarez and I am a current resident of Winterport, Maine. I am testifying here today in **support of LD 468**.

As a single mother of two children, I worry quite often about my ability to feed my children three square meals a day. This is not abnormal in this day and age, and that frightens me. The EBT/SNAP that my family receives is not enough. I attend the University of Maine, Augusta as a full-time student and I work part-time. Despite this, there are multiple days over the course of the month that I go without eating to ensure that my children will not be without. Of course this means I eat my two-year-olds slobbery leftovers, proudly I may add.

Though I currently reside in Winterport, which is a part of Waldo county. I predominantly grew up in Hancock county. I was always in poverty, even when in state custody placed by the foster care system. It was especially hard as a transient, legally emancipated minor at sixteen-years-old to access food, let alone locally grown farm fresh foods. I was denied food stamps for an entire year because I lacked a stable mailing address. I did not trust I could receive mail anywhere, for many good reasons that I won't discuss here today. Please consider how normal my story has become. I invite you to go for a drive with me to visit some of the dozens of transients spread across the more rural parts of our state. You will find a good number of them are under the age of eighteen.

The local farmers in our state have been fighting the good fight for a long time - working hard to provide farm fresh food access to their communities. I know that they are trying to survive and provide for their own families. There are over 130 summer & winter farmers market locations in our state. Many are in the Midcoast and Southern Maine regions. It saddens me that our folks in the Northern and Eastern Maine regions continue to face barriers of access to opportunity for improved health outcomes. However,

programs like Maine Harvest Bucks help make farmers' markets and farm stands more viable in our rural communities. I see the magic of these programs every time I shop with my children at the Belfast and Hampden farmers' markets.

LD 468 will create new opportunities to improve fresh food access at farmers markets in these rural areas. These funds will uplift more farmers, farmers' markets, and stores in our communities to participate in Maine Harvest Bucks & Farm Fresh Rewards. I consider these programs lifesaving.

This fund invests directly in the farmers and eaters in our communities. We have to fill our bellies so that our brains can grow and work properly. We have an opportunity to lift up families, seniors, and our children and brighten Maine's future.

It is critical to many of your constituents' livelihoods and wellbeing that you consider increasing the funding for these nutrition incentive programs. It benefits our state economically, but more importantly for the sustainability of life. Please help protect and strengthen us and support LD 468.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Alvarez, Winterport, ME.