



# BELFAST COMMUNITY CO-OP

*Owned by you. Food for all.*

**Testimony for the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry in Support of LD 468 An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food  
Sponsored by Senator Henry Ingwersen**

March 6, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Gina Ferendo and I am the Store Operations Manager at the Belfast Community Co-op. I am a resident of Belfast, Maine. I am testifying here today in support of LD 468.

Waldo County has a poverty rate of 12.75%, and food insecurity is an increasing struggle for the members of our community. I have been on the front line, working directly with this community since 2017, and I have witnessed as the demand for food access has increased during this time. Since 2019 SNAP sales have tripled in our store alone, as the need for assistance has risen.

Belfast Community Co-op has been a proud retail partner of the Farm Fresh Rewards Program since its inception as Maine Harvest Bucks in 2016. We have the largest redemption of the program in the state of Maine, with over \$80,000 in redemptions in 2024. We have had the opportunity to witness its growing impact, providing nutritious, local food to our low-income shoppers, including young families and our elders, that they would otherwise not be able to access.

In 2024, the Belfast Community Co-op had \$3.5M in local sales from 220 farmers and producers in the state of Maine, including our new partnership with Harvesting Good, a subsidiary of Good Shepherd Food Bank, where 100% of the profits go to local food banks. Funding provided for food access through LD 468 will offer our community and the communities of all FFR partners the ability to take part in our local food economy. It gives them the opportunity to feed their families locally grown produce and drive SNAP dollars back into our local economy.

The impact of LD 468 goes far beyond the dollar value allocated. The increased funding feeds families, provides a source of income for our farmers, and creates a stronger local food economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gina Ferendo, Store Operations Manager

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