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Good morning, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pleucker, and members of the committee for Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

My name is Cheryl Harkins. I live in South Portland. I'm an Advocate with Lived Experience from Homeless Voices for Justice. I'm also appointed to the Statewide Homeless Council. I'm a State co Captain with the National Coalition for the Homeless and I work with the National Alliance to End Homelessness. I'm here to speak with you this morning about LD 468, An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food. As a person who lives on SNAP benefits and Maine Harvest Bucks, I'd like to give you my reasons there should be a permanent \$1,200,000 allotment set aside per fiscal year for the vulnerable people of our state.

Mainers are suffering. Everyone is feeling the pinch from some of the recent cuts from the new administration. Children, the elderly, the disabled, the unhoused, the unemployed. Prices are rising and with the addition of multiple tariffs they aren't likely to go down. As a consumer I have watched grocery chain products slipping. Much of the produce is spoiling on the shelves because it's so expensive many people can't afford it. You pay more money for less. Now there's a threat of children's lunches being stopped so parents will have to find a way to provide extra food and be sure it's nutritious as well.

Maine Harvest Bucks are a necessity to ensure people have access to fresh Farmers Market produce year-round. There are benefits to going to farmers markets. First the price is cheaper and when you use Maine Harvest Bucks you're contributing to the livelihoods of the farmers in our state. You get to walk through the parks in your neighborhood and let your soul soak up the outside. You can hear the music and feel the community. Don't forget the fresh smell of all the produce. You

can even buy cuttings to try to grow your own fruits or vegetables in your house during the winter. You get to talk with the people who actually grow your food and understand how much work goes into it. It's a win-win. Your mind gets to take a break in a good spot and you get to be fed at the same time at a reasonable price and support your community. Most importantly our kids need to eat.

Please vote ought to pass LD 468 so Maine will remain food secure. Thank you for your time.