

Testimony: of Margaret Tapley, Clerk, Augusta Farmers Market

In support of: LD 468, An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents
Access Locally Produced Food

To: Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Maine
Legislature

Date: March 6, 2025

Dear Chairs and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture,
Conservation and Forestry:

My name is Margaret Tapley, I live in Augusta, and I'm the clerk of the Augusta Farmers Market. I will soon be starting my fourth year in this job. The job includes processing all of the state government's EBT or Electronic Benefit Transfer cards. EBT cards are like bank debit cards that hold benefits given to people each month as part of the SNAP or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This program used to be called Food Stamps.

At our market we give out and accept Harvest Bucks. The Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets issues the Harvest Bucks, which are coupons or vouchers used to supplement the state's SNAP benefits. When, for example, an EBT/SNAP shopper spends \$30 buying any kind of food, at check-out I will give the shopper \$30 in Harvest Bucks vouchers. These vouchers can be used directly with a vendor, like cash, to buy only fruits, vegetables, and mushrooms.

One of the things that gives me the greatest happiness, every week, is giving people their Harvest Bucks. It makes me happy to know that they are better able to afford to buy beautiful, fresh, healthy vegetables for themselves and their families. A healthy way of life shouldn't be a privilege.

Our EBT customers are varied:

- Many are retired men and women living on a tight fixed income;
- Many parents, with their babies and active children, come to our market;
- Some are college students;
- Many working people, some trying to make their small business succeed;
- Some are formerly homeless people who have managed to find a place to live and get some helpful services, including an EBT card;
- Some are people dealing with a range of disabilities;
- And some are people who shop regularly at our market until the day they finally get a hoped-for job, with a liveable wage. Many of these people continue shopping with us.

Our EBT customers generally are people who simply found that their income is not adequate for the cost of living these days.

Several years ago, I was an EBT shopper. I highly valued being able, with my Harvest Bucks, to buy a variety of fresh, locally grown vegetables. Far more than I could have without the vouchers. More than just onions and cabbage.

When I talked this week with customers about Harvest Bucks, they enthusiastically expressed the various ways they appreciated them. They all said how the Bucks allowed them to afford to buy fresh local vegetables that they believe are better and healthier than what they find in the grocery stores. They are certain that vegetables and fruits at the farmers market taste better! A girl, around 10 years old, told me she would ONLY eat vegetables from the farmers market.

Our customers also appreciate the variety of local vegetables and fruits at our market.

And most of them also stressed to me how much pleasure they got from being able to support the local farmers who grow and care for their food. Farmers they meet and chat with at the market. They feel that to support them is important.

4

So, I do urge you all to support LD 468. State support for Harvest Bucks is very important. More support for the increasing number of food-stressed people we see every day now is important.

Thank you.

If you have questions, I will try to answer them.