

**Maine Equal Justice**  
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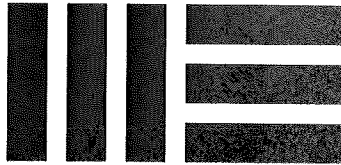
**Testimony in Opposition to LD 938, *An Act to Implement Certain Local Spending and Sourcing Requirements Regarding the Statewide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program***

**April 3, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Alex Carter, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. We are testifying in *opposition* to LD 938 because it both conflicts with federal rules and participant choice which is a core tenant of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

SNAP is the nation's most effective food security program and many of our clients' first line of defense against hunger. One in eight Mainers relies on SNAP to help them buy food, and participation rates are even higher in more rural counties where access to groceries is also a greater challenge. We share an interest in creative solutions to make local food more accessible to all Mainers, including SNAP recipients and kids in school. However, we believe this bill does not achieve that intended outcome and would face a number of problems in implementation:

1. States don't have the authority to restrict where people redeem their benefits. SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded and participants are allowed to spend those benefits wherever they're accepted, including some online retailers. If passed, this bill would likely face challenges from the Food and Nutrition Service agency.
2. There is no way for our state agency to feasibly know the distance between people's homes and where they shop for groceries within the state. They currently only track if benefits are being used outside the state of Maine, but additional tracking would present a significant administrative burden and cost, even if it were possible.
3. If people are regularly traveling more than 50 miles just for groceries, it's likely because they live in a rural food desert and there are no affordable options nearby, or because they shop close to work or family that is outside that radius. We don't want to further



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restrict SNAP participants' access to food by constraining their choices and requiring them to spend 10% of their already limited benefits within a 50-mile radius of their home.

4. The requirement that 10% of all perishable foods in a participating retailer's inventory be locally sourced is not realistic for many grocers and smaller stores, especially in rural areas, which could de-incentivize participation in the SNAP program. This would only serve to deepen the problem of food insecurity and would be counterproductive to the mission of supporting local economies and agriculture.

We should instead be thinking about ways to incentivize local food access, including support for nutrition incentives like Maine Harvest Bucks that allows you to double your SNAP dollars at participating farmer's markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs to purchase more fresh, Maine-grown fruits and vegetables. Even with these programs, SNAP participants need flexibility around choosing to participate because they may not be able to access these options due to work, school, care responsibilities, or lack of transportation.

For all these reasons we urge you to vote ought not to pass on LD 938 and to consider other ways to protect and strengthen Maine's SNAP program and our local food systems.

Thank you and happy to answer any questions.

**Alex Carter**

*she/her/hers*

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