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United Way  
of Southern Maine



Good afternoon, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee,

My name is Terence Miller, and I am the Advocacy Director at Preble Street. Preble Street's mission is to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and advocate for solutions to these issues. Preble Street operates a Food Security Hub (FSH), which produces up to 2,000 nutritious meals daily for Mainers experiencing food insecurity. With the capital improvement funding this committee and Senator Talbot Ross helped support last session, we can prepare up to 10,000 meals a day starting in October, when the kitchen renovation will be completed.

Last year, the Food Security Hub received 131,266 pounds of local produce from over 20 community farm partners, which were utilized in 544,361 nutritious meals. One month ago, the USDA announced the termination of two programs that brought local food to non-profits addressing food insecurity: the Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program. These two Federal programs combined provided more than \$100,000 worth of local farm produce to Preble Street, providing an estimated 90,000 meals for people experiencing food insecurity.

Preble Street urges you to support LD 1605, which would help food pantries to fill the gap left by the abrupt end of these two USDA programs and continue to serve nutritious, local food to low-income communities.

I want to take a moment to highlight one of our Food Security Hub partnerships that will be the hardest hit by the termination of these programs. Every year, we receive 15,000 pounds of tomatoes from Liberation Farms, a farm in Auburn. These fresh tomatoes are used to prepare sauces, soups, and salads. Before establishing this partnership, we depended upon canned tomatoes, which often have added preservatives and cannot be used in the same variety of dishes as fresh tomatoes. Without the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program, we will no longer have access to these tomatoes. Liberation Farms will lose a dedicated buyer, hurting Maine's agricultural economy and limiting its ability to fight food insecurity.

We urge the committee to support LD 1605, which will help food security programs and food producers like Liberation Farms recover from this cut to USDA grants. By providing a lifeline to these organizations, the legislature can support Maine's agricultural economy while working toward ending food insecurity by providing nutritious meals made from Maine farm produce.

50 years of turning hunger and homelessness into opportunity and hope