

**Testimony of Tobey Solomon-Auger, Anti-Hunger Policy Coordinator
Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

LD 2040, An Act to Survey Food Insecurity in Maine

January 7, 2026

Good Afternoon, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Tobey Solomon-Auger and I am the Anti-Hunger Policy Coordinator in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2040, An Act To Survey Food Insecurity in Maine.

The Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) was established in 2019 by Governor Mills to address critical, long-term issues facing Maine, by engaging state agencies, stakeholders and the public in the planning and implementation of innovative, data-driven policy solutions.

In 2022, Maine's 130th State Legislature passed LD 174 An Act to Implement Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger. That legislation directed the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to provide staffing and coordinate implementation of Maine's Roadmap with guidance from an advisory committee.

Until recently, Maine's Ending Hunger Initiative has relied on measures of household food insecurity from the USDA. Since 1995, the USDA has published an annual Household Food Insecurity Report every fall that measures the prevalence and severity of food insecurity, providing a rate of low and very low food insecurity. Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger "envisions a Maine free of hunger" and uses the USDA's food insecurity rates to track its progress. The authors of the Roadmap defined free from hunger as no very low food insecurity and 4% low food insecurity as measured by USDA. USDA's measures also provided the basis for the Ending Hunger in Maine dashboard and key sources of food insecurity data like Feeding America's Map the Meal gap report, enabling us to track progress towards our goals.

USDA's survey allowed us to see trends in food insecurity over time, the impact of policy changes, and how Maine's rates of food insecurity compared to other states. We were able

to see how expansions to economic security programs during the pandemic led to a decrease in food insecurity while the reversal of those policies coming out of the pandemic led to a subsequent rise in food insecurity. Cancelling the survey and report soon after SNAP faced the program's largest cuts in history creates a gap in the data and will make it harder to track the impact.

Losing USDA's food insecurity measure eliminates a key source of data for Maine's Ending Hunger Initiative and we thank Representative Pluecker for making a proposal to address this concern.

We agree that understanding the state of food insecurity is essential to informing efforts to address food insecurity. And we know even without USDA's report that households across Maine are experiencing food insecurity and having a hard time making ends meet.

The Governor is supportive of Representative Pluecker's proposal to replace the survey. Staff at GOPIF are still assessing the best approach to addressing the absence of USDA's survey and report. We are currently gathering information and advice from national experts, taking part in conversations about alternative measurements with stakeholders like Full Plates Full Potential, and look forward to bringing this to the Ending Hunger Advisory Committee for further discussion.

Taking this on at the state level would require ongoing significant funding and considerable staff capacity. Therefore, we want to be sure that we are directing resources in the most effective way, with guidance from the Ending Hunger Advisory Committee and state and national data experts.

We are also not alone in this. Many national partners and states are considering the same questions. We are in the process of exploring what other efforts may be underway to fill this gap and see value in aligning efforts at the state level with efforts nationally. For example, it has been helpful to be able to compare food insecurity rates in Maine to a national benchmark and to other states, one benefit of USDA's nationwide survey.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute and I welcome any questions.