



**Testimony for the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry in Support of LD 2040 A Pilot Program to Assess Food Insecurity in Maine**

**January 7, 2026**

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I'm Anna Korsen, Deputy Director with Full Plates Full Potential, a statewide non-profit working to address childhood food insecurity in Maine by maximizing access to federally funded USDA nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and school meals. I also serve as the co-chair of the Ending Hunger in Maine Advisory Committee. Full Plates is also a contracted SNAP Outreach organization, engaging with schools, families and other community organizations to provide accurate information about SNAP for the Department of Health and Human Services.

I am testifying in support of LD 2040 because having accurate and timely data is one of the most important tools we have for addressing hunger in Maine. Following the cancellation of the USDA's Food Security Survey, that data is now gone. This information isn't just critical to Full Plates' work to effectively address childhood hunger in Maine, or our collective commitment to end hunger through the state's Ending Hunger Initiative. It's critical to our understanding of what's working, what's not, and our ability to use that information to direct resources toward anti-hunger programs and initiatives that make the greatest impact. Without federal data, we will be flying blind. LD 2040 proposes to pilot a statewide food insecurity data system which will be privately funded via philanthropy (minus \$500 to establish a state fund) that can help to fill the federal food insecurity data gap and ensure state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and healthcare providers can target food support resources for effective intervention. This pilot is also a key component of Maine's Initiative to End Hunger and historic commitment to universal school meals, as we cannot track our progress or impact without data.

Over the last decade, access to reliable data has allowed us to make major strides in reducing hunger in Maine. Without data, we would not have known that Covid-era programs to address hunger, including increased SNAP benefits, national school meals for all, and the expanded Child Tax Credit, resulted in rapid and dramatic declines in child poverty and child food insecurity. Without that same data, we also wouldn't know that after those Covid-era programs ended, child hunger and child poverty increased once again. The final USDA Food Security Report was recently released, and it shows that food insecurity continues to rise across the country.<sup>1</sup>

We know that food insecurity is especially prevalent in rural communities where resources and grocery stores are scarce. We also know that children are especially vulnerable when household costs rise and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=113622>



adults need to make hard choices. Maine has the highest rate of childhood food insecurity in New England, with 1 in 5 Maine kids unsure of where their next meal will come from. In rural areas, like Aroostook County, 1 in 4 children are food insecure.<sup>2</sup> While 13% of Mainers participate in SNAP (and so qualify based on income eligibility guidelines), in Aroostook County, 23% of people and 29% of households need SNAP to afford food.<sup>3</sup> But even though SNAP is our nation's most effective anti-hunger program, it rarely stretches through the month. On a recent visit with school nutrition staff from across Aroostook county, we heard stories of students not eating for days when school was out. Without timely data, students like this will be harder and harder to identify. We owe it to Maine's children to ensure our existing and future investment in their health is making a difference.

I grew up in rural Maine, first in Jackman and then in Steep Falls. My dad was the doctor in both communities, trading healthcare for firewood or odd jobs because the majority of his patients lived in deep poverty. He would often treat patients for chronic illnesses likely caused, in part, by lifelong food insecurity. But his clinic didn't routinely screen for hunger, as most healthcare providers do today, so it remained invisible. As a child, I remember the little boy in front of me in the lunchline getting in trouble for filling his pockets with as much food as he could. The school couldn't know or understand that he was trying to provide food for himself and his family over the weekend because they never had enough.

This was all before the USDA began tracking and measuring food insecurity in 1995, and after 30 years of gaining a better understanding of food insecurity in America, we are about to go backwards. Like with School Meals for All, Maine has the opportunity to lead once again and thankfully with the help of a budding private-public partnership backed by philanthropic investment, we can fill the gap using existing data and build a data system that will work better for Maine. Maine could track and evaluate hunger in real time resulting in more effective and efficient resource allocation and deeper impact.

Please support LD 2040 and this new statewide effort to better track and understand food insecurity in Maine. It allows us to see, allows us to act, and empowers us to ensure Maine kids and families have a future free from hunger. I'm happy to answer any questions, and can be available for the work session. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important bill.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/child/main>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>