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Maine Equal Justice

People Policy Solutions

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Testimony in Support of LD 2040, An Act to Survey Food Insecurity in Maine

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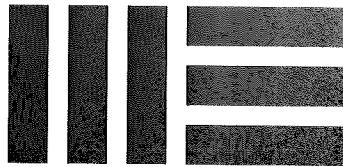
Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Alex Carter, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm a Senior Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. As a member of the Maine's Ending Hunger Advisory Committee, and on behalf of the people with low-income who we represent, I'm testifying in support of LD 2040.

Following the passage of H.R.1 and the largest cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the history of the program, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced they were cancelling the longstanding Household Food Security Report. For three decades, this annual study provided a singular source of data on the state of food insecurity in the U.S. and formed the basis for policy interventions to combat hunger. Without this important data, it will be harder to track trends in food insecurity and evaluate the impacts of policy. This includes obscuring the likely increases in food insecurity that will result from the expected loss of and changes to SNAP benefits.

The Maine legislature made a strong commitment to ending hunger by passing bipartisan legislation, LD 1159 a “Resolve to End Hunger in Maine by 2030,” that tasked the state with creating a strategic plan to eliminate food insecurity. The result was Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger which was endorsed by the legislature in 2022 with the passage of LD 174. That legislation directed the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to staff and coordinate the implementation of Maine’s Roadmap and establish a statewide Ending Hunger Advisory Committee composed of diverse stakeholders, including organizations like ours and people directly impacted by hunger.¹ Since then working groups on the Committee have identified Priority Areas for Aligned Action to focus our energies in the short-term, but without good data, we won’t know if these efforts are achieving our goal of reducing food insecurity and ending hunger in Maine.

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/future/hunger>

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LD 2040 would direct the Commissioner of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry to pilot an annual survey to measure food insecurity in Maine and to serve as the basis for a regular report on the state of hunger. This would both strengthen Maine's initiative to end hunger and serve to protect our state investments in proven-effective nutrition programs. A state-led survey would also provide a unique opportunity for inter-agency collaboration and for Maine to capture state-specific data on geographic differences and other disparities among social sub-groups to better target and prioritize our interventions.

The federal government is abdicating its responsibilities, and the state of Maine must step up to fill strategic gaps and ensure that policies can be fairly evaluated. Just because we don't study a problem or look in the other direction doesn't mean it goes away, and hunger is a growing reality for far too many Mainers.² I encourage you to support LD 2040 to ensure that Maine has up-to-date and accurate data on food insecurity for a hunger-free future.

² <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maine>