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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

IN FAVOR OF LD 2004

*An Act to Enhance Support of Local Nutrition Incentive Programs by Modifying the Eligibility Requirements of the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives*

January 7, 2026

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Michelle Webb. I am the director of the Agriculture Resource Development (ARD) Division within the Bureau of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) in favor of LD 2004, *An Act to Enhance Support of Local Nutrition Incentive Programs by Modifying the Eligibility Requirements of the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives*.

Three years ago, the Department came before you in support of LD 568, the bill that established a \$600,000 appropriation to Maine's Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives, and we were pleased last year when the Legislature approved Governor Mills' budget proposal that made an ongoing annual \$600,000 appropriation to the fund. We see the fund as a shared victory for both local food producers and Maine eaters, and we believe LD 2004 will safeguard its impact.

Here's how the fund works: Programs exist within both private philanthropy and the USDA that fund efforts to encourage individuals who use nutrition benefits, such as SNAP and WIC, to spend their benefits on healthy, local foods. For nearly twenty years (since 2007), Maine organizations have successfully leveraged these resources to create programs like Farm Fresh Rewards, which incentivizes purchases at grocery stores, and Maine Harvest Bucks, which incentivizes purchases at CSAs and farmers' markets. Critically, the fund provides the State's contribution to this work, increasing the availability of healthy Maine-grown food while simultaneously expanding market access for Maine farmers. It is also important to note that the delivery of Maine-produced food by way of existing retail

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infrastructure has proven to be a highly cost-effective and efficient way for State funds to support food security efforts.

The federal government has been the biggest—though not the only—investor in nutrition benefits, which is why the program’s statutory language currently requires a *federal* match. The fund was created with the assumption that this would always be the case. What we witnessed this past fall was a pause in the payment of federal nutrition benefits and the prospect that they might be significantly reduced or canceled altogether in the future. LD 2004 is a response to this new reality and would simply strike the term *federal* from the program’s requirements.

With this fund, Maine made a significant, ongoing commitment to both Maine people experiencing food insecurity and Maine farmers and food producers, two very important constituencies. Removing the modifier “federal” from the term “food and nutrition assistance programs” in the existing statute makes clear that Maine can continue to make this important investment, even if the nutrition benefits are not being amplified or incentivized by the federal government.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions now or at the work session.