



January 14, 2026

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United Way  
of Southern Maine



Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Terence Miller, and I am the Advocacy Director at Preble Street. The mission of Preble Street is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems. Preble Street operates 20 programs throughout Maine, and our staff works daily alongside hundreds of individuals and families who struggle with food insecurity.

I am here today on behalf of Preble Street to express our strong support for LD 2051, which clarifies the SNAP rules for non-citizens who meet the hardship exception, including people impacted by domestic violence, so they remain eligible for state-funded SNAP benefits.

As you all are aware, Maine's state-funded SNAP program was established in 1997 to support legally present non-citizens who do not qualify for federal benefits in meeting their basic needs. LD 2051 adds a missing definition to the statute in response to recent federal changes to SNAP regulations. This update will improve clarity for DHHS staff while ensuring that individuals and families impacted by domestic violence and severe human trafficking, who the initial statute intended to protect, are food secure.

Preble Street's Anti-Trafficking Services program has worked with numerous survivors of severe trafficking and domestic violence who needed food access provided through Maine's state-funded SNAP. One story out of hundreds illustrates how the state-funded SNAP benefit could be a critical lifesaver. Maria, a survivor of trafficking from Central America, and her child survived due to this benefit. After Maria's child was born, she could not keep her employment due to the lack of affordable childcare. Although Maria is now employed, she can only work a limited number of hours because she still lacks access to childcare, which significantly impedes her ability to increase her income. Recently, Maria's SNAP benefits were cut, further destabilizing her family. Without SNAP and with limited work hours, Maria and her young children must now spend much of their limited time searching for food resources, such as food pantries, instead of focusing on employment or long-term stability. This experience is not unique to Maria; it is prevalent among survivors of trafficking, survivors of domestic violence, and legally present asylum seekers and refugees, all of whom face compounding barriers when critical support like childcare and nutrition assistance is inaccessible.

Ensuring survivors of trafficking have access to food benefits will also help keep them from re-entering a trafficking situation. Traffickers target vulnerabilities to coerce victims into sex work or other labor. They will look to satisfy whatever need an individual has, most often, basic needs like food and housing.

LD 2051 provides clarity, allowing legally present non-citizens who are survivors of domestic violence or trafficking who meet a hardship exception to receive food access through state-funded SNAP benefits. In the words of Preble Street founder Joe Kreisler, "I am a human being, part of my job, part of being alive is making sure other people are, too." Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 2051. Thank you.