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Maine Equal Justice

People Policy Solutions

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Testimony in Support of LD 2051, An Act to Ensure Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Maine

January 14, 2026

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Alex Carter, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Senior Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice (MEJ), a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. As an organization that serves immigrants and represents low-income people who struggle with food insecurity, I am testifying in support of LD 2051.

Before we delve into federal law, Maine's legislative history, and complex terminology, I first want to ground us in what and who we're discussing. We are here today to talk about low income, lawfully present members of Maine's immigrant communities and their ability to continue to receive food assistance. In the simplest terms, we're talking about hunger and who is considered deserving in this country of having enough to eat.

I. History and Legislative Intent

Since 1997, Maine has provided state-funded food assistance to support certain lawfully present immigrant groups to meet their nutritional needs. In direct response to the sharp restrictions on immigrants' eligibility for federal means-tested benefits passed under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), the Maine legislature established its state-funded program for noncitizens who would otherwise qualify for SNAP, but for the federal exclusions. The Maine Legislature has since reaffirmed and refined the statute multiple times, with bipartisan support, adding the current hardship exceptions for people who are elderly, disabled, experiencing domestic violence, waiting for work authorization, or unemployed. Just like the federal program, state SNAP benefits help people with low-income purchase groceries and beneficiaries must comply with all other program rules including income guidelines and work reporting requirements while also meeting one of the outlined hardship exceptions.



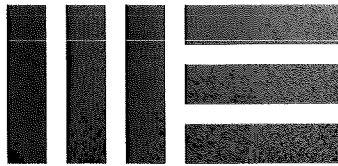
II. Recent Federal Changes

H.R.1—the sweeping budget reconciliation bill passed by Congress and the Trump Administration in July 2025—made the largest cuts to the SNAP program since its inception and further restricted immigrants’ eligibility for essential benefits. The new federal law layered onto PRWORA’s existing definition of “qualified” immigrants, carving out people with humanitarian protections from food assistance and health insurance programs. Under H.R.1, heavily vetted refugees and asylees, certain survivors of trafficking and abuse, and other previously “qualified” humanitarian immigrants are no longer eligible for federal SNAP benefits. Sadly, the same group of immigrants will lose eligibility for Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) later this year, removing yet another support system for people escaping persecution and violence.

This is both cruel and short-sighted. Many of these individuals have been resettled in the U.S. or waited years for an application to be approved and many still will go on to become lawful permanent residents, U.S. citizens, and contributing members of our communities. Programs like SNAP are a bridge for newly arrived families, helping them get on their feet, pursue education and employment, and build a strong foundation. At a moment when immigrants are under relentless attack, the very least we can do is make sure that the people we’ve welcomed to Maine can still access food assistance in times of need.

III. LD 2051

The state-funded SNAP program was created for this expressed purpose: as a safety net for noncitizens with legal permission to remain in the U.S. who lose access to federal benefits. Under our reading of the law, humanitarian immigrants facing new restrictions should already be eligible for state-funded SNAP if they meet the other program qualifications. LD 2051 simply clarifies the definition of “noncitizen legally admitted to the United States” to ensure that those who should currently receive SNAP benefits in Maine can continue to receive them if they experience a hardship. The intent is not to expand eligibility, but rather to preserve it for as many people as possible under existing law and to



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help make benefit determinations more efficient. Should the Department interpret the impact of this legislation differently, we would be happy to work with them and the bill sponsor on language that better achieves that aim.

For nearly 30 years, the Legislature's intent has remained clear and consistent: to ensure lawfully present noncitizens continue to have access to food assistance when federal law withdraws eligibility. LD 2051 reaffirms and clarifies that intent in response to new federal law. Maine cannot fill every gap left by H.R.1, but LD 2051 is one targeted way we can mitigate harm and prioritize protections for those most impacted. Please support LD 2051.

I would be happy to answer any questions, and I will be available for the work session.

Thank you,

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