



# **Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS**

## **Testimony in Support of LD 2064**

### ***An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools***

#### **Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

February 5, 2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Sam Zuckerman. I am the Policy Coordinator of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2064, “An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools.”

The Permanent Commission’s Policy Committee broadly supports legislation aimed at addressing food insecurity in Maine, recognizing access to food as a foundational part of thriving for all Maine people. We also recognize that inequality around food access today has historical roots in the theft of land and labor from Indigenous communities, Black Americans, and other marginalized and exploited people. A 2022 report by the Permanent Commission, for example, showed that while 76% of white food producers are full owners of their land, that ratio drops to only 11% for Black and African American producers.<sup>1</sup> The legacies of these inequalities in our food system continue to have ripple impacts.

Because of these systemic barriers to food access, we can trace notable inequalities by race here in Maine. Black Mainers, for example, are statistically more likely than white Mainers to rely on SNAP benefits to feed their families.<sup>2</sup> 28% of households of color and 40% of Black

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<sup>1</sup> Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. 2022. Land Access for Indigenous and African American Farmers in Maine.

<sup>2</sup> Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. Social Drivers of Health Dashboard. <https://pcritp.me/sdoh>

households in Maine face food insecurity,<sup>3</sup> compared to only 13% of white households.<sup>4</sup> These challenges are compounded for racial minorities who are also new Mainers or those seeking asylum, who face additional challenges to accessing state benefits and securing reliable forms of income.

Many of these impacts fall first and hardest on children. In 2022, 1 in 8 people and 1 in 5 children in Maine experienced hunger.<sup>5</sup> For many children, school is a reliable source of sustenance when their families are struggling to afford or access food.

This bill would ensure that children of color and children from new Mainer communities have a consistent source of nutritious food and do not face the long-term consequences associated with food insecurity. A 2021 review of studies on the impact of food insecurity on childhood development found that there was a significant and lasting negative impact on academic and cognitive outcomes and behavioral problems.<sup>6</sup> Children who face food insecurity may also face increased health problems like anemia and asthma.<sup>7</sup> Ensuring that kids have access to nutritious food at school will help to mitigate the long-lasting impacts of food insecurity while we work to also address the upstream causes to prevent it entirely.

Thank you for your time and attention. We urge you to vote in support of this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>3</sup> Graham, G. (2021, March 28). Pandemic reveals race disparities around hunger in Maine. Portland Press Herald. <https://www.pressherald.com/2021/03/28/pandemic-reveals-race-disparities-around-hunger-in-maine/>

<sup>4</sup> Myall, J. (2019). Issue Brief: Food Insecurity in Maine . Maine Center for Economic Policy. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/MECEP-Hunger-Issue-Brief-2019.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Feeding America. (n.d.). Maine. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maine>

<sup>6</sup> Gallegos D, Eivers A, Sondergeld P, Pattinson C. Food Insecurity and Child Development: A State-of-the-Art Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2021 Aug 26, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8431639/#sec3-ijerph-18-08990>

<sup>7</sup> Feeding America. Facts about child hunger. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/child-hunger-facts>