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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

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**TESTIMONY OF SPEAKER RYAN D. FECTEAU PRESENTING LD 2122, An Act to Prevent Negative Impacts from Federal Funding Changes to and Fund Eligibility Determinations and Outreach for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Ryan Fecteau, and I have the privilege of representing my hometown of Biddeford.

I am here today to present LD 2122, *An Act to Prevent Negative Impacts from Federal Funding Changes to and Fund Eligibility Determinations and Outreach for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*, which I am proud to sponsor.

We all continue to hear about the current and upcoming impacts of H.R. 1. These federal changes are coming at a time when Maine families are *already* struggling to pay for essentials like housing, childcare, and groceries. Among the devastating cuts contained in the bill, H.R. 1 poses a massive threat to food security in Maine. It will make significant, detrimental changes to our SNAP program, adding significant state costs and administrative burdens for the Department and for SNAP recipients.

Let me be clear - these changes are going to hurt hard-working Maine families. Nearly 75% of Maine's SNAP households include at least one working adult, more than half include a person with a disability, 43% include an older adult, and over one-third include children. These benefits, and these people, are worth protecting. This is why I am putting forward LD 2122, a measure that I hope will help mitigate at least some of the harmful federal changes and protect access to food for hard-working Maine families.

First, LD 2122 directs DHHS to implement a system to reduce our SNAP "error rate." As I know this committee is aware, H.R. 1 will result in significant costs to states based on their rate of SNAP overpayments and underpayments. Despite Maine's error rate being under the national average, any rate above 6% will mean Maine is responsible for funding a portion of benefits. This puts us in a time crunch to reduce our error rate as much as possible before Oct 1, 2027. If we cannot meet the 6% marker, Maine will be responsible for approximately \$54 million in state funds for SNAP benefits. I am aware that technology funding is already included in the DHHS portion of the budget, and from conversations with the Department I understand that this funding will, in part, be used for system improvements specifically

focused on error rate reduction. I defer to the committee moving forward on whether any additional funding is necessary.

The bill also proposes a state grant to support existing SNAP outreach contractors with a state funding match, as well as funding for SNAP outreach contractors to hire an outreach coordinator to support and improve communications to SNAP recipients. Our SNAP outreach contractors operate across the state, and serve a critical role in outreach and application assistance. Previously, Maine received 50% federal funding to support that work, with each SNAP outreach contractor responsible for coming up with the 50% funding match. Starting next fall, due to the administrative cost shift, SNAP outreach contractors will only receive 25% federal funding and will be required to come up with the remaining 75% match. While the 50% match was already a hurdle for these organizations, the administrative cost shift will threaten this program entirely. At a time when many variables are changing in the SNAP program, and additional reporting will be required for many SNAP recipients (including new work reporting requirements), the role of trusted messengers in our communities will be especially critical in helping eligible Mainers retain access to their benefits and put food on the table for their family.

I understand that the administrative cost shift is going to raise Department costs significantly and across the board, but I implore this committee to consider the role of these trusted community organizations as credible messengers for SNAP recipients, helping them retain their benefits, and helping reduce administrative burden on the Office of Family Independence.

Last but certainly not least, this bill will establish a nonlapsing SNAP contingency fund to be administered by the Department. The fund will be used to provide SNAP benefits in the event the Federal Government fails to provide SNAP funding to the state. The necessity of establishing this fund became apparent to me this past fall, when the roughly 170,000 Mainers that rely on SNAP faced uncertainty about whether they would receive their benefits during the 42-day, longest ever government shutdown. Unfortunately, our current reality means that Maine has to be prepared to step in if this were to happen again. I think we can all agree that the 12.5% of our population that relies on SNAP should not have to fear going hungry because of the Washington dysfunction. This would give the state access to roughly 3 months of SNAP benefit payments that can be administered in a time of crisis like we faced this fall.

As costs on everyday necessities continue to rise, pinching the budgets of Maine families, I hope we can all agree that everyone deserves access to food. I hope we can come together to reaffirm that hardworking Maine families should have access to and the ability to afford putting food on the table.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of the proposal, and I would be happy to take any questions.