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United Way
of Southern Maine



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

My name is Annika Moore, and I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. The mission of Preble Street is to provide accessible barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems. Our Food Security Hub (FSH), located in South Portland, currently produces over 2,500 meals daily for people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, youth, families with children, older adults, Veterans, and immigrants and asylum seekers. Preble Street is a proud member of Hunger Free Maine, a coalition formed to advocate for policies that advance Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger.

I am here today to speak in strong support of LD 2122, which represents a critical step in Maine's efforts to address food insecurity. As many of you know, the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" passed by Congress and signed by the President last July makes drastic changes to SNAP program. Every Mainer who relies on SNAP will be affected by this legislation in some way, and many will lose their benefits entirely.

In addition to expanding punitive work reporting rules, the federal budget reconciliation bill requires states, for the first time ever, to pay a portion of benefits if they have an error rate above 6%. This part of the budget reconciliation bill alone could cost up the state to \$53 million per year starting in October 2027, depending on how quickly we can lower our Payment Error Rate.

The Payment Error Rate is a measure of genuine mistakes made by DHHS staff or program participants and not an indication of fraud or intentional wrongdoing. For example, if a recipient does not know how to report the cost of their heating bill to DHHS, they could receive a lower benefit amount than they are entitled to, which could contribute to the Payment Error Rate.

LD 2122 implements vital measures aimed at addressing the Payment Error Rate, including investing in technology upgrades and strengthening SNAP outreach to help recipients navigate program changes. Together with the measures outlined in the Supplemental Budget, we hope that these investments will prevent over- and under-payments and reduce the share of benefit costs that Maine will be on the hook for in future years.

Yesterday, I spoke with caseworkers in our Veterans Housing Services program who shared that their clients—homeless Veterans—are beginning to lose SNAP because of the federal budget reconciliation bill. Many of these Veterans are living outside in Maine's harsh winter while trying to secure housing and do not have the ability to work 20 hours a week. Without SNAP, these Veterans may struggle to access food and increasingly rely on food pantries and other emergency food services that are already stretched thin.

Every Mainer deserves to have enough to eat. LD 2122 is a critical step in addressing the immense threat to food security in our state created by the federal budget reconciliation bill. We urge this committee protect the SNAP program, which 1 in 8 Mainers rely on, by passing LD 2122.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions.