



Maine Municipal
Association

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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Opposition to

LD 95 - RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to Food

February 23, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neill, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham and I am testifying in opposition to LD 95 at the direction of our 70-member Legislative Policy Committee.

Referendums elections are funded almost exclusively by Maine property taxpayers, who also support food security efforts with local revenue. While they are fundamental to delivering democracy, they are also expensive and time consuming.

Constitutional amendments are restrictive, open communities to legal challenges for delivery or protection of resources, and generally only established concretely through the creation of case law to those legal challenges. Once settled, case law can strip a community, or this legislature, of the flexibility necessary to respond to fundamental human rights issues.

Municipal officials dedicate a significant amount of resources to filling unmet needs of their residents who fall through the cracks of a complex system of federal and state food poverty programs. Not only are they acutely aware of the incredible growth of food insecurity for Maine's residents, they are actively attempting to address it locally with limited resources and a variety of creative means from funding local food banks and encouraging food donations during town meetings to delivering school meals directly to student homes in the pandemic.

Not only do municipal officials believe that the right to food is inherent, they understand how challenging it can be for even the savviest residents to navigate the complex system of food assistance programs. Their locally created responses are sometimes the only way many residents receive food especially when they are daunted by incredibly low income levels necessary to qualify for programs or the paperwork associated with the process that can be rejected for marginal reasons.

Recognizing that it is vital for the legislature to have the flexibility to support and address food insecurity and respond to challenges that threaten personal farming in strong ways through regulation and land law, municipal officials ask that this committee vote ought not to pass on this legislation. The revenue to carry out the referendum is better remaining in service and improvement of existing programs.