



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1400  
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

## Sean Paulhus

677 Middle Street  
Bath, ME 04530

Phone: (207) 751-7760

[Sean.Paulhus@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Sean.Paulhus@legislature.maine.gov)

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### Testimony of Rep. Sean Paulhus

#### Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Presenting L.D. 1299

#### An Act To Permit Emergency Funding for Food Banks When a State of Emergency is Declared

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, I am Sean Paulhus, Representative for House District 52, the city of Bath. I am glad to be here to present **LD 1299, An Act To Permit Emergency Funding for Food Banks When a State of Emergency is Declared.**

This bill authorizes the governor to immediately distribute up to \$400,000 from the state's budget stabilization fund to food banks throughout Maine when our state enters a period of civil emergency.

We know - and we will hear testimony later to this effect - that the pandemic caused such sudden economic devastation and food insecurity that food banks across the state experienced major spikes in demand. Think of how many people across the state can barely muster \$400 extra in a moment of extreme hardship. That is how we ended up with so many people who were first-time visitors to a food bank.

Additionally, the nature of the pandemic created logistical challenges with financial hurdles of their own that food banks had to adapt to. Like the budget of those who rely on them, the budgets of most food banks are extremely tight.

The Mills administration worked very hard to address these struggles on both the supply and the demand side, and it deserves credit for adapting on the fly.

We don't know when the next crisis will arrive or what its nature will be. But with the frequency of disasters around the world increasing, it's not a matter of if it will happen - it's a matter of when. In a way, we were very lucky that the 129th Legislature was already in session when COVID-19 found its way into Maine. We authorized the governor to take swift action to save lives and access crucial federal funding and we passed legislation to protect our residents as they began to face health crises and massive unemployment.

We need strong tools in place to meet immediate needs. The Legislature won't always be in session or in a position to return to session when future crises make themselves known. LD 1299 is a way to make sure that people across Maine can take advantage of the experience and expertise of those already best equipped to feed others: our network of food banks. It allows any governor to act immediately to ensure that those who bear the worst of a disaster will know that a plate of food for them and their children is never too far out of reach.

I appreciate the committee's thoughtfulness on an issue I know matters a great deal to all of us, and I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.