



Testimony in Support of LD 174, *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group*

January 18, 2022

Good morning, Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio, and I’m the Advocacy & Programs Director for Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. Today I am testifying in support of LD 174, An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group.

As you’ve heard others say today, this bill had its beginnings in legislation in 2019 and has had multiple phases of development in the years since. I’ve been a part of the process since its beginning and am excited that we’ve gotten to this point. When we began, we couldn’t imagine some of the challenges we’ve all faced since the pandemic hit our state and the world. While hunger and its root causes were already a serious issue for Maine, the pandemic helped further illuminate the challenges faced by so many across our state. I’m appreciative of everyone who helped collect data and research, who dug deeply into a wide range of policy areas and potential solutions, and who gave their time to this important effort. I’d especially like to express my gratitude to the impacted people with lived experience who participated in this process and developed a report¹ reviewing the initial Interim Report of the Advisory Group and to inform our continuing work. With leadership and support from Sass Linneken and Dee Clarke, the work of those individuals had a profound impact on the final plan created by the Advisory Group: “Everyone at the Table: Maine’s Plan to End Hunger by 2030.” As we continue this process, I hope we will also continue to invest in the participation of people with lived experience of hunger because they know best what is needed for them to have food security and financial security.

One aspect of this plan that gives me real hope for progress is its dual focus on both improving our systems that help people who are experiencing food insecurity right now, but also and just as importantly, it focuses on the need to address the challenging root causes of food insecurity

¹ <https://www.resourcesforsocialchange.org/home/ehm2030-impacted-community-project>

that cut across many policy areas and will require the commitment to action of multiple state agencies as well as policymakers, community-based organizations, and businesses among others. For that reason, we support the proposal to move the work of the Advisory Group to the Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) as it is best suited to coordinate multi-agency efforts.

Because you have heard from many others today about specific proposals named in the plan, I won't go into those today. Changing the frame with which we talk about hunger and poverty is critical to moving our approach to solutions from a harmful approach that blames those who are hungry to a proactive approach that recognizes that broken and racist systems are the cause of hunger and food insecurity so solutions must fix or build new systems to address those issues. With this approach, we can maximize our participation in existing programs and make them easier for individuals in need to access, and we can also envision new approaches that can truly end hunger for all Mainers. As stated in the report from impacted people:

When hunger is looked at, and treated, as a symptom rather than a root cause problem, it becomes clear finding solutions to end it can't occur without first examining the conditions that create it. While hunger may occur for any plethora of the individual-centric reasons that keep a person from earning a living wage within a system that doesn't value the lives of those with little power, money or ability, if we only point our focus there we'll miss an opportunity to create a thriving, well balanced environment where we can grow new possibilities from what was thought to be inevitably unattainable.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I urge you to support LD 174. I can answer any questions you have now and can also be available for the work session when it is scheduled.