

Support for LD 174

An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group

Good morning, Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture Conservation & Forestry,

I'm here today to voice support for LD 174, An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group. I'm here in both a personal and professional capacity. I've been working on this plan professionally for more than a year as my organization was asked to organize a group of people impacted by hunger and poverty to review the recommendations made in the Interim Report to End Hunger in Maine By 2030, and to offer feedback and additional ideas. In that regard, this means an incredible amount to me, because I watched the folks I helped organize put everything they have into painting a clear and honest picture of exactly what they need and why they need it, which came at no small cost because it required them to tap into painful and traumatic experiences that have kept them struggling, and because of the nature of the project, to do that tapping with an audience of people who hold power over them, which wasn't always easy.

I come to this personally as well as professionally because I come from a lifetime of poverty. I grew up with failure to thrive, school kids used to call me Cancer Patient because my hair was so thin from lack of nutrition. I experienced chronic homelessness from the time I was 16 years old until I was 23, and up until I was in my late twenties, I weighed under 100 lbs. I'm 43 years old and in my entire life I've only been without the need for public assistance for 3 short years, and as of now, unless something changes for me, I'll be working until I die because I've never had the luxury of saving for retirement, or for a home, or for any other asset I might be able to trade later for the cash needed to survive when my body is going to want to give out.

The reason I'm asking you to pass this bill isn't because of its focus on food. I'm asking you to pass this because of its focus on the root causes of hunger, which require us to take a strategic look at how low wages, lack of affordable housing and healthcare, lack of transportation and affordable childcare, lack of supports for people who live with disabilities and their caretakers, and disproportionate impacts on certain groups of people all play a role in how a person can access adequate nutrition, and frankly some modicum of feeling whole and happy. This plan was deeply informed by people who know what they need. It didn't come easy to us to ask for it, and there were a number of times where we discussed how little we believed we were even being listened to. And then last week, we got a chance to see what was being delivered to you for consideration, and a number of us cried while reading it because of how much we saw our voices reflected, and even more to the point, how effective we believe these recommendations are. The Interim Plan was passed with a groundswell of support. You can't imagine what it will feel like to those of us who struggle to see that type of support continue knowing we've helped to put this in motion. It's not perfect and there's still a ton of work to do, but please pass this bill and not only help this work to continue, send a strong message to people who've been impacted by poverty and hunger that their voices really do matter.

Thank you for listening.

Sass Linneken
Skowhegan, ME
Sass.rosc@gmail.com