

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

January 18, 2022

James Myall, Economic Policy Analyst

Dear Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

I am writing on behalf of the Maine Center for Economic Policy in support of LD 174.

I was fortunate to work with the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group as part of the strategy and metrics support team and the equity review team. I can attest to the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of the work of the Advisory Group. The draft final report is the result of intentional conversations with experts, advocates and impacted communities.

The report is particularly commendable for taking a holistic view on the causes of hunger and food insecurity in Maine. It recognizes that at its core, hunger is an economic problem. In the richest country in the history of the world, there is no shortage of food available. The problem is that too many Americans are impoverished because our economy doesn’t work for everyone.

At the heart of the report’s recommendations is the need to bolster Mainers’ economic security so that they no longer struggle to afford food. Raising the minimum wage to a thriving wage and supporting the creation of good-paying jobs that are widely available will ensure that no working Mainers are trapped in working poverty. Maximizing eligibility for federal safety net programs and improving accessibility for those programs will help those Mainers who fall on hard times and are unable to work for whatever reason.

The report recognizes that economic security requires access to affordable housing, health care and child care. We cannot address the problem of food insecurity without recognizing that low-income Mainers often struggle to meet other essential needs. Too many Mainers are faced with making impossible choices between health, shelter, and food.

Finally, the report is commendable for its consideration of equity as a key component of ending hunger in Maine. The data is very clear that Mainers of Color are much more likely to experience hunger than white Mainers. Unless we prioritize equity in our approach to ending hunger, this gap will persist. Addressing the needs of Black, Latino, and Indigenous Mainers does not mean ignoring the needs of the tens of thousands of white Mainers experiencing food insecurity. The strategies in the report, especially ensuring access to good-paying jobs and a robust safety net, will be beneficial to Mainers of all races and ethnic backgrounds. Centering equity doesn’t mean advantaging people of color at the expense of white Mainers. It means being intentional to ensure that Mainers of Color aren’t left behind as the plan is implemented. It means ensuring that Mainers of Color aren’t held back from opportunity by discrimination or systemic barriers. It ensures that our economy works well for everyone and no one is left behind.

The Ending Hunger by 2030 report very clearly shows that the goal of ending hunger in our state is within reach, and simply requires political will to achieve. I urge you to seize that political will and pass a bill that sets Maine on a path to eliminate hunger within the next decade.

Thank you. If you have any questions, I can be reached at jmyall@mecep.org

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LD 174

Please find attached testimony on behalf of the Maine Center for Economic Policy