

Testimony in Support of LD 568: An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and other esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

The Somali Bantu Community Association (SBCA) would like to express our support of LD 568 - An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives. SBCA believes that funding nutrition incentives is essential in order to support our local farmers and food access for our community.

SBCA's mission is to provide vital transitional services, advocacy, and food production that empowers members of the refugee community to uphold cultural identity and economic well-being to thrive in their new life here in Maine. One of our major programs is Liberation Farms, a community farming program that provides new American farmers access to, and culturally-appropriate resources for, the means of sustainable food production for themselves, their families, and their communities. This investment in growing nourishes body and soul as farmers meaningfully utilize their agricultural roots as they build new homes here in Maine.

LD 568 supports Liberation Farms in our food justice in action model. Liberation Farms addresses issues of hunger and accessibility in our region, subsidizing produce prices to high-needs schools and institutions. This provides supplemental income and food to our farmers, nearly all of whom qualify for SNAP. We engage in "farm to low-income consumer" markets by selling at farmers markets that accept SNAP, WIC, and Maine Harvest Bucks. We also accept Maine Harvest Bucks at the Suuq, our farm stand located at our farm in Wales. We continue to build relationships and pathways to distribute our food in ways that advance food justice in our state and community and nutrition incentives are an important part of our model. We love being able to accept SNAP benefits and offering Maine Harvest Bucks to incentivize people using SNAP to shop local. An investment in these nutrition incentives would allow us to continue to participate in these vital programs and match SNAP dollars 1 to 1 instead of a 50% match, which would encourage shoppers to buy local even more.

The Somali Bantu Community Association also serves the particular daily needs of approximately 2,000 Somali Bantu refugees in downtown Lewiston, Maine. Nutrition incentives like Maine Harvest Bucks, support people in our community, many of whom access SNAP benefits. Nutrition incentives allow our community to further their SNAP dollars, and prioritize healthy, local food that our own community grows.

LD 568 would support our community as farmers, improving the viability of our food justice in action model and it would support our community as consumers, increasing access to local food for people using SNAP benefits. Please support this bill.