



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

April 19, 2023

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

We are pleased and honored to provide written testimony to express the YMCA of Southern Maine's full support of LD1612, An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture.

We strongly and proudly endorse the buildout of the Preble Street Food Security Hub because it will transform the Food Program's capacity to meet food-security-related needs in a variety of ways, dramatically improving the health and wellbeing of Mainers across the state. LD 1612 and the Food Security Hub will:

- Make a significant contribution to reducing hunger and a vital role in emergency preparedness for Maine.
- Expand the Food Security Hub's capacity to produce 10,000 meals daily.
- Promote long-term, sustainable solutions to improve food security and achieve food justice while supporting local agriculture. Based on current estimates, 75% of the products preserved at the Food Security Hub will be Maine-grown.
- Preserve approximately 180,000 pounds of product within the first 18 months and steadily increase to support the community's needs. Fully realized, the Food Security Hub will be able to process up to 5000 pounds of local produce *daily*, up from the current 5000 pounds each week.
- Allow for increased food access and community capacity through dedicated collaborative space and initiatives.

We fully support Preble Street's vision to expand this vital program to more communities throughout Maine. The Y has experienced the tremendous impact of the food program first-hand.

It has been an invaluable resource for the people we serve in our Men's Dormitory Program, many of whom are transitioning out of homelessness. The flexibility and responsiveness of the food program has enabled us to meet the most urgent and critical needs.

In 2020, when the pandemic hit, the Y needed to provide safe, secure space for the 88 men in our dormitory program. This included ensuring participants would stay at the Y and not go out into the community during lockdown, for their and other's safety. Consistent and reliable access to nutritious meals played a key role in ensuring this happened. When Preble Street heard of our need, and without hesitation, began delivering three healthy meals each day for every person in the dorm. We are fortunate that this service has continued. It has become a vital resource for the men to support their health and wellbeing.



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More recently, the Y has had the honor of stepping in to support new immigrant families arriving in our community through partnerships with the Salvation Army, Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition, Greater Portland Family Promise, Amistad and the City of Portland. We were able to provide the space and community at the Y. Again, Preble Street has responded quickly, providing healthy nutritious meals for the families. Many of these families arrived at the YMCA hungry, cold, and with young children. The meals provided by Preble Street provide nourishment beyond the physical, bringing a sense of safety, care and welcome to our new neighbors.

We deeply value our partnership with Preble Street and the work they are doing with the community. LD 1612 will ensure more Mainers are fed, supporting their health and the strength of our communities. We strongly urge you to support LD 1612 for the wellbeing of all.

Sincerely,

Helen L. Breña
President & CEO
YMCA of Southern Maine