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# Maine Equal Justice

People Policy Solutions

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## **Testimony in Support of LD 1612, *An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture***

**April 19, 2023**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Plueker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Alex Carter, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1612, *An Act to Address Food Security and Support Local Agriculture*.

Food security remains a persistent challenge in our state. Nationally, food prices have reached historic highs and are predicted to increase by another 7.5% over the course of 2023.<sup>1</sup> As a result of the pandemic, hunger in Maine rose by an estimated 25%, with the greatest burden falling on residents of Cumberland County.<sup>2</sup> Many of our clients with low income are struggling to put food on the table between the high cost of basic necessities and the end of pandemic-era programs that helped so many stave off hunger and poverty.<sup>3</sup>

With the end of additional Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits known as emergency allotments, SNAP households have returned to inadequate, pre-pandemic benefit levels and increasingly turned to our charitable food system to make up the difference.<sup>4</sup> In response to the increased demand for resources, Preble Street launched their new Food Security Hub which aims to address food insecurity by providing grocery boxes and meals directly to those in need and supporting local agriculture by sourcing local ingredients.

The Food Security Hub currently serves 26 towns in Southern Maine and prepares 2,000 hot meals a day for delivery to various sites including homeless and youth services. Once fully funded and fully operational, the hub will be able to prepare upwards of 10,000 nutritious

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2019/overall/maine/county/cumberland>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epi.org/blog/pandemic-safety-net-programs-kept-millions-out-of-poverty-in-2021-new-census-data-show/#:~:text=Government%20social%20programs%20kept%20tens,to%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic.>

<sup>4</sup> <https://wgme.com/news/local/maine-food-pantries-increased-need-snap-benefits-food-stamps-south-portland-cupboard-hunger>

meals a day and expand community offerings in their multi-use space in South Portland.<sup>5</sup> I have had the pleasure of visiting the Preble Street Food Security Hub and witnessed first-hand the scale and efficiency with which they are able to deliver quality, nutritious food. I can also attest to the delicious lunch they prepared for us—and thousands more—with local Maine seafood.

Preble Street and Homeless Voices for Justice are seeking one-time, state funding to help realize this vision, contributing to the health of our communities and the health of our local food systems. Maine Equal Justice serves many of the same individuals who utilize these services and supports Preble Street's critical work to combat hunger in our state. We urge you to vote ought to pass on Speaker's bill, LD 1612, for a more food secure future in Maine.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.preblestreet.org/what-we-do/food-programs/foodsecurityhub/>