

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

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 for LD 1612 - An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture. SBCA believes that an investment in the Preble Street Food Security Hub will ensure food security for the thousands of people it serves and support Somali Bantu farmers through our important partnership.

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.

Liberation Farms grows fresh, chemical-free produce with a goal of distributing our produce to low-income communities. In the summer of 2022, Preble Street and Liberation Farms joined forces to bring fresh produce to the Preble Street Food Security Hub. During this summer, Liberation Farms distributed 13,000 pounds of tomatoes to the Preble St Food Security Hub.

Preble St. has provided a significant market for Liberation Farms, allowing us to continue producing at our current scale and ensure financial stability for our farmers. Additionally, Preble St.'s new Food Security Hub allows for increased processing capacity. Their dedicated team can develop large scale recipes for nearly 2,000 meals each day. Therefore, they are able to use whatever Liberation Farms has in abundance, taking advantage of surplus items so that our farmers can balance the items they retain to sell directly to consumers at farmers markets and for other customers.

Liberation Farms looks forward to continuing our relationship with Preble St. this season and beyond. LD 1612 would support and expand our impactful partnership with the Preble Street Food Security Hub, improving the viability of our food justice in action model and providing sustainable livelihoods for our farmers.