

Testimony of Jim Hanna of Portland in **Support** LD 1612 of An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture

Honorable Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

As Executive Director of the Cumberland County Food Security Council (CCFSC), I represent a diverse food system coalition that agrees our community must be prepared for increased need and directly address community nutrition security. Preble Street is a critical member of our network.

A few days before the pandemic shutdown in March, 2020, I testified to this ACF committee about the unique commitment we made to end hunger in Maine by 2030. When our individual and collective lives were derailed by the lockdown of public spaces, Preble Street had to respond to the continuing lack of food access with a then, even more, vulnerable population of unhoused people. With congregate meals no longer an option and unlikely to be for the foreseeable future, Mark Swann convened community leaders with a commitment to disrupt hunger. Preble Street began forming the plans for the Food Security Hub.

I have been fortunate to visit the evolving meal production center three times over the past couple years as infrastructure has been developed, most recently with Speaker Talbot Ross. I understand this \$2 million appropriation is the final piece of funding required to complete the facility. Once it is ready, it will have the capacity to produce 10,000 meals a day, five times more than its current capacity.

This capacity is critical to our community's preparedness to meet the daily nutrition security needs of the most vulnerable among us. For example, the City of Portland just reopened the Expo to provide shelter to about 300 asylees. This requires 900 meals a day to nourish people who have very little food access otherwise. While the Food Security Hub is addressing a significant percentage of this need, with its other commitments, it is not developed to the point that it can provide every meal. This means the rest of the community has been scrambling to fill the gaps. This is creating inefficiencies when many other agencies could be addressing other needs to prepare these new arrivals for becoming successful members of our community.

Another important element of this investment is the Food Security Hub's commitment to purchasing from Maine farmers, particularly under resourced and socially disadvantaged farmers. For example, the Somali Bantu farmers in Wales began last season with a contract to grow 100s of pounds sauce tomatoes and other vegetables for the Portland Public Schools food service multi-use marinara sauce. Because of a surplus of frozen sauce left over during the pandemic and a change in food service leadership, PPS was unable to fully honor the contract. The nimbleness of the Food Security Hub allowed them to step in and purchase those surplus tomatoes and vegetables to feed the community while preventing a large group of vulnerable farmers from being impacted by a severe economic loss.

Other important elements of the Hub include a council of people with lived experience of hunger and poverty who will advise on its development and practices. It will eventually offer office space, making it easier for the network of people working to nourish the community to collaborate.

CCFSC supports this \$2 million appropriation for the Food Security Hub. This entity will serve as a critical piece of infrastructure as Maine moves toward our goal of ending hunger by 2030.

James Hanna
Cumberland County Food Security Council
LD 1612

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