

Senator Henry Ingwersen and Representative Bill Pluecker and Committee Members on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

The American Heart Association (AHA) is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke, whose mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. We are testifying in support of **LD 1612 "An Act to Address Food Insecurity and Support Local Agriculture"**.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities. SNAP is the largest program in the hunger safety net and the benefits are 100% federally funded. In Maine, SNAP serves over 52,000 Mainer workers in households that participated in the Food Supplement Program. Because most households redeem their monthly SNAP benefits quickly, SNAP is one of the most effective forms of economic stimulus during a downturn.

Nearly one in seven American households experience food insecurity, lacking the resources for consistent and dependable access to food. The SNAP program benefits more than 15 million children who are in one of every two households receiving benefits. SNAP benefits support vulnerable populations including children, people with disabilities and older Americans, as well as an increasing number of low-income working families. SNAP plays an important role in reducing poverty and food insecurity. SNAP benefits lifted at least 4.7 million people out of poverty in 2014, including 2.1 million children. SNAP's positive effects extend across the lifespan. SNAP benefits for expectant mothers can reduce the incidence of low birth-weight babies between five and 23 percent. Receiving SNAP benefits as a child can increase likelihood of completing high school by up to 18 percent. SNAP benefits can also lead to overall health and economic self-sufficiency among women. Although essential in addressing food insecurity and nutrition, current SNAP benefit levels are not sufficient to sustain many families through the end of the month. More than half of SNAP households report experiencing food insecurity. Research has shown that exhaustion of SNAP benefits by the end of the month can also decrease test scores and increase disciplinary events among school-aged children. Insufficiency of benefits can cause serious health problems related to diabetes and can lead to costly and avoidable hospitalizations.

SNAP improves health outcomes and reduces healthcare costs. When compared with demographically similar people without SNAP, research confirms that children who receive SNAP have lower risk of obesity, lower risk of poor health, fewer hospital admissions for failure to thrive, and less likelihood of developing metabolic syndrome such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes as adults. Children who receive SNAP are also more likely to have better academic performance, increased high school completion rates, and increased economic

self-sufficiency and earnings as adults.¹ Similar health outcomes are seen in adults who receive benefits. Adults who receive SNAP have better self-reported health, fewer hospitalizations, lower risk of high blood pressure, and lower risk of diabetes.²

Many communities are poised to benefit from additional SNAP dollars by way of a boost in local economic activity, improved health outcomes, lower healthcare costs and hunger prevention. Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration of our comments. If you have any questions or need further information, please contact me via email at allyson.perron@heart.org or by phone at 867-540-9686.

Sincerely,
Allyson Perron Drag
American Heart Association/ Stroke Association
Senior Government Relations Director

² Deborah Frank, M.D., S. Ettinger de Cuba, M.Sandel, and M. Black, "SNAP cuts will harm children in the USA," *The Lancet*, vol 382, no 9899, (2013), pp.1155-6 ; Executive Office of the President of the United States, "LongTerm Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," December 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/SNAP_report_final_nonembargo.pdf, pp.24-8.

² "Long-Term Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," *Ibid*, pp. 23-4.